

THE
EVIDENCES
OF
CHRISTIANITY:

STATED IN
A POPULAR AND PRACTICAL MANNER,
IN
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CONTENTS

OF THE

SECOND VOLUME.

LECTURE XIV.

	Page
SUITABLENESS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE STATE AND WANTS OF MAN.—1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.	1
The Christian Revelation is suited to man as it speaks a decisive language, and gives repose and satisfaction to the mind in the greatest and most perplexing difficulties	9
As it UNFOLDS ALL THE MYSTERIES OF HIS CONDITION	13
Accounts for the apparent contradiction of his state, and addresses him in this condition, and no other	17
As it PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR ALL HIS WANTS	17
Proposes adequate motives	19
Places man in a new and more favourable state of probation	20
Sets before him a system of means	20
All agreeing with his outward circumstances in this world	21
This remedy is also calculated to draw out to the utmost, all the powers and faculties of man	21
And carry him on to his true end	22
As it is CALCULATED FOR UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION under the endless diversities of his state and character	23
Both as to the matter of Revelation	23
And the manner or form of it	25
CHRISTIANITY CONNIVES AT NO ONE VICE	27
This adaptation does not STRIKE the mind at once	27
Is a PROSPECTIVE SCHEME formed by the wisdom of God, and revealed perfec' and complete at once	28
And is VIEWED ARIGHT from the MIDST OF HUMAN WEAKNESS, MISERY, AND SORROW	29

LECTURE XV.

	Page
THE EXCELLENCIES OF THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY.—1 JOHN iv. 8—10.	32
The CHIEF DOCTRINES ENUMERATED	33
The being, perfection and providence of the one living and true God	33
The guilt and condemnation of man	35
Redemption in the incarnation and sacrifice of the SON of God	37
The personality and operations of the HOLY SPIRIT	39
The Sacraments, and other means of grace	40
The resurrection of the dead, and the last solemn judgment	40
The EXCELLENCY of the doctrines	42
They all emanate from the character of God	42
Possess simplicity	43
And a surpassing grandeur and sublimity	44
Their harmony	45
Meet all the necessities of man, and yet promote the ends of God's moral government	48
Are deeply humiliating, and in the highest degree consolatory	50
The magnitude and sublimity of the great design of Almighty God, of which the doctrines are the result	53
An APPEAL; whether the inward evidence of Christianity, from its peculiar doctrines, does not shine brighter and brighter	57
A correspondent love and gratitude to God on the part of the true Christian, ought to be produced	58

LECTURE XVI.

THE UNSPOTTED PURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MORALS.—TITUS ii. 11—15.	59
The EXTENT and PURITY of the Christian morals	60
They embrace all that was really good in the ethics of Heathen sages	61
Are complete	61
Erect the only true and unbending standard of duty to God and man	62
Omit many false virtues of heathenism, and insist on many real ones unknown to it	62
Dwell chiefly on the mild and retiring virtues	63
Require an abstinence from the proximate causes of evil	63

CONTENTS.

	Page
Christian morality regards outward forms of devotion and piety, as means to a higher end	64
All Christian precepts aid each other	64
And go to form a particular sort of character	65
The way the gospel proceeds to make these precepts practicable	66
Christianity begins with the heart	66
Aims at achieving its object by the formation of habits	66
Directs men to aim at the highest attainments, whilst she encourages the weakest efforts	67
Keeps aloof from secular policy	68
Delivers her code in the form of maxims and prohibitions, clear and decisive	68
Works by setting forth strong and affecting examples	70
Refers men to the ALL-SEEING EYE OF GOD	71
The connexion of the morals of Christianity with every other part of Revelation, and especially with its PECULIAR DOCTRINES	71
The facts on which the doctrines rest, prepare for the operation of motives	72
The doctrines are expressly designed, and admirably adapted, to produce Christian obedience	72
They go to form that sort of character which the morals require	73
The love of Christ constrains	74
The promises and privileges of the gospel are attached to certain dispositions and states of mind	74
Christianity holds out to men further advances in holiness	75
The doctrine of the heavenly state	75
The manner in which the precepts are involved in all the other parts of Revelation	76
The sanctions by which the Christian morals are ultimately enforced	77
The will of God is the authority of moral obedience	78
The morality of the gospel makes it impossible, in the nature of things, that Christianity should be an imposture	81
The above is strengthened by the wretched system which modern infidels propose for the direction of mankind	82
Men ought, therefore, to hold fast by the Christian Faith	83

LECTURE XVII.

	Page
THE PRE-EMINENT CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF OUR LORD.—MARK vii. 37.	86
Claims of CHRIST	87
The conduct of our LORD in his more peculiar character as MEDIATOR	90
The manner in which he sustained his high claims of being the Son of God and the Saviour of the world	90
His conduct as a Teacher and Revealer of the will of God	92
His manner of instruction	93
The matter of his instruction	94
The manner in which our LORD supported the state of humiliation	96
The heavenly reward that he promised to his disciples	98
The conduct of our LORD as THE EXAMPLE OF HUMAN VIRTUE TO HIS DISCIPLES	100
His piety and devotion to his heavenly Father	100
His benevolence and compassion towards man	101
His meekness and lowliness of spirit	103
His superiority to the world	103
His strict temperance and command of the inferior appetites	104
His fortitude and constancy	104
His prudence and discretion	105
The UNION of separate graces	106
His virtues were unalloyed with the kindred failings	106
The opposite, and to us apparently contradictory, graces were found in him in equal proportion	106
All was carried to the greatest height, and continued in one even tenor	107
A peculiar harmony	108
The character of our LORD as THE FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION	108
Its suitableness to the necessities of man	108
The surprising novelty and sublimity of our Saviour's character	110
The different parts of our LORD's character correspond with his undertaking	111
The impression and effect of the whole public character of CHRIST	113
The manner in which it is given by the Evangelists	113
This argument springs from a FAIR PRESUMPTION upon the first statement of the case	116

	Page
Rises higher by CONTRASTING the character of CHRIST with that of all others	116
Becomes a moral demonstration, when the OTHER BRANCHES of the Christian evidence are taken into the account	119
IT BEARS AWAY the heart of the docile, and strengthens all the principles of individual belief and love	121

LECTURE XVIII.

THE TENDENCY OF CHRISTIANITY TO PROMOTE IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE THE TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL HAPPINESS OF NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS.—LUKE ii. 13, 14.	124
The nature of the argument explained	125
The DIRECTION which Christianity takes	128
It comes down to man's actual circumstances	129
Its direct tendency as to nations	130
Its indirect tendency	132
THE HINDRANCES WHICH IMPEDE THE FULL EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION	132
THE SUCCESS OF CHRISTIANITY IN PROPORTION TO THE REMOVAL OF THESE HINDRANCES	136
In the age following the establishment of the gospel	137
The next ages	138
At the period of the Reformation	138
In any subsequent age	138
The proportion holds with regard to national welfare	139
This TENDENCY is still in progress	139
And arises from principles new to man	141
The hindrances were foretold by Christianity herself	142
THE ULTIMATE EFFECTS WHICH CHRISTIANITY WILL PRODUCE WHEN ALL OBSTACLES ARE REMOVED	143
Let each one ask himself, What is the tendency of MY CHRISTIANITY?	150
PRAY for the copious influences of grace	152

LECTURE XIX.

THE TEST TO WHICH EVERY ONE MAY BRING THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, BY HUMBLY SUBMITTING TO ITS DIRECTIONS, AND MAKING A TRIAL FOR HIMSELF OF ITS PROMISED BLESSINGS.—1 JOHN v. 10.	154
The NATURE of the argument	155

	Page
The SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY on which it rests . . .	160
The facts by which it is sustained . . .	164
The SINGULAR IMPORTANCE of the proof thus deduced .	174
APPEAL to sincere Christians in confirmation of the argu- ment	185

LECTURE XX.

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE TEST TO WHICH MEN MAY BRING THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION.—	
PSALM xxxiv. 8.	188
The characters addressed described	189
The DIRECTIONS ; study Christianity in the BIBLE itself	192
TRACE out in your own heart the truth of its statements as to the condition of man and his guilt before God .	196
PRAY fervently to God for his grace	200
Use the MEANS which God has promised to bless . . .	203
Keep your eye fixed on JESUS CHRIST	205
Observe how all the parts of Christianity CONSTITUTE a whole, and meet all the necessities of your case .	207
The RESULT	208
HISTORICAL faith will only INCREASE your condemnation	212
No NEED to make an experiment of ANY OTHER FORM of religion or irreligion	213

LECTURE XXI.

THE VANITY AND FUTILITY OF THE OBJECTIONS BROUGHT AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.—2 PETER iii. 3, 4, 8, 9.	
The best method of treating objections considered . . .	215
They are INADMISSIBLE , being speculative opinions, and aimed against Revelation	218
They are CONTRADICTORY one to the other	219
They are FRIVOLOUS in themselves, and manifestly spring from the pride and ignorance of the human mind .	225
They are upon the whole only TRIALS of our sincerity and submission of heart to God, and go to CONFIRM rather than weaken the Christian evidences	231
Sophisms of infidelity fix themselves in UNFURNISHED and VAIN minds	243
SHUN those vices which prepare for them	248
PROVOKE not the good SPIRIT of God to depart from you	249

	Page
See that you have a REAL HOLD on Christianity in its SUBSTANTIAL BLESSINGS	250
Objections of infidelity are STRATAGEMS of Satan	251
Consider them as the most DEADLY PRODUCT of the cor- rupt and proud reason of a fallen creature	252

LECTURE XXII.

THE LIVES AND DEATHS OF INFIDELS COM- PARED WITH THOSE OF SINCERE CHRIS- TIANs.—PSALM xxxvii. 35—37.	255
Contrast the two classes as to THE TENOR of their lives	256
Their more PUBLIC LABOURS, and THE WRITINGS they have submitted to the eye of mankind	271
Their DEATHS AND PREPARATION FOR AN ETERNAL STATE of being	279
WITH WHICH COMPANY DO YOU WALK in the journey of life?	296

LECTURE XXIII.

THE FAITH WITH WHICH THE CHRISTIAN RE- VELATION IS TO BE RECEIVED.—JOHN v. 9.	298
The NATURE of faith in divine Revelation	299
Definition and illustration of faith	300
It must be a living principle	303
Difficulty in exercising faith in religion arises from the corruption of man	304
The scriptural account of faith	306
The REASONABLENESS of such a faith after admitting the divine authority of Christianity	307
The discoveries of the Christian religion show this	308
The province of reason marked out	311
The necessity of divine aid, in order to believe aright, is most reasonable	312
The EXTENT to which faith should be carried	314
Faith should embrace every part of Revelation	315
Give to each the relative importance assigned	317
Stop with minute and watchful conscientiousness where the Revelation stops	318
Follow the language as well as the sentiments of the holy Scriptures	320
Faith produces TRANQUILITY	321
And is the PRINCIPLE of the Christian life	323
EXAMINE whether your faith be LIVING AND INFLUENTIAL	324

	Page
IMPLORE the grace of the Holy Spirit to IMPART to you such a faith	326
The HIGHEST DEGREES OF FAITH are best calculated to produce HUMILITY OF MIND	328

LECTURE XXIV.

THE SOUND INTERPRETATION OF THE RECORDS OF REVELATION.—2 TIMOTHY ii. 15.	330
A right method of interpreting Scripture, SPRINGS DIRECTLY FROM A TRUE FAITH. For such a faith	331
Implies an honest application of our understanding to the Scriptures	331
Includes a willingness to submit our understanding and heart to all the truths which God is pleased to reveal	332
Puts us in possession of many of the blessings of which the Scriptures treat	333
Leads us to seek the assistance of God's blessed Spirit in rightly understanding the Scriptures	335
Guards us against the danger of hazardous interpretations, or a false use of difficult passages	335
And disposes us to resort to all necessary helps	336
COMMON SENSE and the ORDINARY LAWS of human language aid the right interpretation	337
The simplest sense is generally the true one	339
The occasion of the book being written should be consulted	339
Let brief passages be explained by those that are more full on the same or kindred subjects	340
Figurative and poetical parts should be interpreted by the fixed and ordinary laws which are constantly applied to such language in common life	341
We should suspend our judgment where, after all, a passage is not obvious	343
The great scope and analogy of truth will either solve all material difficulties, or render them practically useful	344
The rules SUGGESTED by that particular character of INSPIRATION which belongs to the Bible	345
We should rise to the sublimity of the Scripture mysteries	345
We must give to the last portion of Revelation that weight which it may justly claim	346
What is temporary, local, and extraordinary, must not be allowed to hide the lustre of what is permanent and uniform	347

	Page
Distinction must be made between vital Christianity and merely nominal adherence to its external ordinances .	349
The use and place and relative bearings of every truth are to be derived from the Scriptures, as well as the truth itself .	350
We must not force the simple meaning of Scripture either to express or exclude mysteries according to our turn of mind .	351
We must not attempt to reduce truth to a human system	354
The OBJECTION to Revelation, founded on the diversity of interpretations, stated and refuted by showing .	356
That the facts have been greatly exaggerated .	356
That they are not chargeable on Christianity .	357
That they fall chiefly on subordinate matters .	358
That the remaining evils may be diminished and avoided in practice .	358
That the universal Church has presented but one front of truth to mankind .	358
APPLICATION.	
Vital Christianity of the heart can alone interpret aright	359
Let each one who is conscious that he has never understood his Bible, humble himself before the throne of mercy, and implore the grace of the illuminating Spirit	360

LECTURE XXV.

THE UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION WHICH LIES UPON EVERY HUMAN BEING TO OBEY THIS DIVINE REVELATION.—JOHN iii. 18—21.	363
ALL MEN ARE BOUND to love and obey God by the strongest ANTECEDENT OBLIGATIONS .	365
CHRISTIANITY is so EXCELLENT in itself, that the slightest external evidence is sufficient to oblige men to obey it	369
The real SIMPLICITY, VARIETY, INDEPENDENCE, and FORCE of the evidences increase the obligation .	373
The PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES which each individual has respectively enjoyed, UNSPEAKABLY AUGMENT the duty	381
The momentous discoveries which Christianity makes, and the deep INTERESTS at stake, carry the obligation to an inconceivable height .	385
Let, then, your submission to Christianity be IMMEDIATE	392
And CORDIAL .	393

	Page
A BRIEF REVIEW of the argument arising from the internal proofs	394
The general nature of the argument	396
Its details	398
Its agreement with the probationary and imperfect state of man	401
The several branches of the argument to be collected together	402

LECTURE XXVI.

CONCLUSION OF THE ENTIRE COURSE.—JOHN XX. 30, 31.	404
Some REMARKS upon the whole of the subject which we have discussed	404
The TIDE of proof, as it has been rolling down from its earliest rise to the present hour	405
The INCIDENTAL manner in which the flood has been formed	412
The ACTUAL MASS of Evidence now before our eyes	416
An ADDRESS to the rulers and governors of our country	422
The ministers of Christ's church	425
The humble and teachable	429
Ascription of praise to God	432

LECTURES.

LECTURE XIV.

SUITABLENESS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE STATE AND WANTS OF MAN.

1 COR. xiv. 24, 25.

But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all : and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

HAVING considered in our former Lectures the first great division of the Evidences of Christianity, those which establish the Authenticity, Credibility, Divine Authority, and Inspiration of our sacred books ; we come now to the second division of them, those arising from the excellency of the contents of the religion itself.

The first division is termed **THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES**, because they attend the religion from without, and attest its divine origin ; the second are called **THE INTERNAL**, because they come from within, and

arise from those characters of truth which are wrought into the very nature and composition of the revelation.

External evidences are the credentials of the messenger who comes to us from the Lord of heaven and earth ; the internal are derived from the excellency of the message which he delivers. The latter evidences, therefore, follow the former, and are subsidiary to them.

Our Lord and his apostles placed Christianity on this footing. They came with the most undoubted miraculous works, and claimed at once the obedience of mankind ; and afterwards, they appealed to those unnumbered indications of a divine excellency which the matter of their doctrine contained.

The external evidences now raise us as nearly as possible to the same situation with the Jews and Heathen at the promulgation of the gospel. By means of them, we still see, as it were, the miracles, and witness the divine works, of our Lord and his apostles.¹ We do more ; we trace a surprising accomplishment of a series of prophecies, in the person of Christ and the events of his church ;² we read the accounts of the supernatural propagation of his religion ;³ we behold the manifest good effects produced on mankind.⁴ On this ground we are bound to believe the doctrine ; and doing this, we shall be in a situation to follow out, with the first Christians, the numberless proofs of a divine excellency in the matter of revelation itself.

But here it is important to remark, that the converts of our Lord and his apostles would never have been permitted to examine, in the first place, the doctrines of Christianity on the footing of their own reasoning, and of suspending their obedience on the agreement or non-agreement of its instructions, with their preconceived notions of what it was fit for God to reveal : this would have been monstrous and absurd ; it would

¹ Lect. VII. vol. 1.

² Lectures VIII. and IX.

³ Lect. X.

⁴ Lect. XI.

have been to sit in judgment on the Almighty, and would have raised the most impenetrable barrier against any perception of the internal evidences at all.

In like manner, men can never be allowed now to investigate, in the first place, the matter of revelation by the pretended fitness of things and the light of their own reason, and to suspend their obedience on the agreement or non-agreement of the doctrine with their pre-conceived notions. This would suppose a previous acquaintance with what a divine revelation should contain; and, if true, would altogether supersede the necessity of it. It is hard to say whether the pride or folly of such a notion be the greater. But sure it is, that such a mind would never discover any internal evidence of the truth of Christianity.

And yet this is the course pursued almost uniformly by unbelievers. They pass over the immense body of external evidences; they begin with inquiring into what they term the reasonableness of the things revealed; they plunge into metaphysics;⁵ they then, of course, misunderstand or pervert almost every article of the faith which they profess to examine; and, lastly, reject Christianity as not according with their notions of wisdom and expediency.

Not so the sincere inquirer. He receives Christianity with humble gratitude, on the ground of the external credentials with which Almighty God has been pleased to accompany it; and then he traces out, as he is able, those intrinsic excellencies of the matter revealed, which may confirm his faith and animate him in his obedience. He is so far from thinking that a revelation cannot come from God, because he sees not in every respect the fitness and reasonableness of its contents, that, on the contrary, he concludes that the revelation is wise, good, just, and fit to be received, because he has every reason to believe,

⁵ See the remarks on this practice in Bishop Van Mildert's *History of Infidelity*.

from its external evidences, that it has a divine origin.^c

It is in this manner we reason as to the works of nature and providence. When once we have admitted the being and perfections of an all-wise Creator, from the grandeur and contrivance and harmony pervading the general order of creation, we conclude that the unnumbered parts of it which we do not yet understand, are good, because they come from the same divine hand. Thus also, when we have once received a divine revelation on its undoubted miraculous proofs, we are bound to conclude that all the matter of it is good and right, because it comes from the God of truth and holiness.

It is necessary to observe, however, here,—what will be obvious to every considerate person,—that the internal evidences do not arise from all the parts of revelation; but from those which are level in some measure to our comprehension, or addressed to our experience. They do not spring from the matter of revelation as it respects the being, subsistence, and will of the ever-blessed God; his purposes, his permission of this or that course of things, his choice of this or that method of recovering man. These are quite out of our sight. We have no data to proceed upon, and therefore can know nothing. They are of the nature of discoveries, and are made to us from a system of things of which an infinite Being is the author.⁷ We receive these implicitly on the footing of the external evidence, and there we leave them; except as any inferences drawn from them may bear upon our duty and hopes.

But internal evidence arises from the matter of revelation as it respects the SUITABLENESS OF THE RELIGION, in its practical bearings, to the obvious wants of man;⁸ as it regards the display of the moral attributes

^c Bishop Gibson.

⁷ Davison,

⁸ Present Lecture.

of the Supreme Being in the DOCTRINES REVEALED;⁹ as it appears in the EXCELLENCY OF THE RULE OF MORAL DUTY;¹⁰ as it is beheld in the INIMITABLE EXAMPLE OF OUR LORD;¹¹ as it is viewed in the TENDENCY OF REVELATION TO PROMOTE IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE HUMAN HAPPINESS;¹² as it proposes a TEST TO WHICH EVERY ONE MAY BRING IT, BY SUBMITTING TO ITS DIRECTIONS, AND MAKING A TRIAL OF ITS PROMISED BLESSINGS.¹³

In these respects we have data to go upon. We have feelings; we are capable of judging in some respects of moral causes and consequences; we have means of tracing out the same indications of divine wisdom, the same holy ends and contrivances in the gospel, as we find in the general providential government of God in the world. We are thus applying the revelation to its proper purposes, considering it according to its own principles and structure, and advancing in our knowledge and admiration of its various parts.

This evidence is most important. It might indeed have pleased God, so far as we can judge, to give us a revelation so elevated in all its parts, as to furnish no internal evidences, or very slight ones, in the sense in which we now understand the term. We should have been still obliged to receive and obey it with humble thankfulness, and wait for the reasons of things in a future world. But it has pleased God to grant us a revelation, from many branches of which internal testimonies flow in rich abundance; and we have only to put them in their due place, and use them for their proper ends, in order to derive all the advantages they were designed to convey.

The external evidences are first in point of time, and superior in respect of authority; they are as the

⁹ Lect. XV.¹⁰ Lect. XVI¹¹ Lect. XVII.¹² Lect. XVIII.¹³ Lect. XIX. and XX.

outward credentials of an act of a human legislature, proving the source whence it emanates, and the obligation which it imposes.

The internal evidences are second in point of time, and subsidiary as it regards the divine authority of revelation—they spring from the excellent and appropriate contents of the law itself.

But though the internal proofs are second in point of time, they have a force peculiar to themselves, and such as no human laws can claim. For as revelation proceeds from the infinitely wise God, and relates to the eternal salvation of mankind, the matter of it must have a perfection and an interest far surpassing all that the wisest acts of human legislation can possess.

The internal evidences, in fact, raise us from the mere conviction of truth, to the love and admiration of it. The external proofs are addressed to mankind generally, to awaken their attention; the internal, to disciples who have already received the religion, and have a confidence in all its declarations. The external evidences prove that the religion is obligatory; the internal show that it is good. The one attests the authority of the divine Legislator; the other proves to us the wisdom and efficacy of his enactments.

The internal evidences are, therefore, in some respects, of a more satisfactory kind, and bring more repose to the inmost soul of man than the external. The one makes an impression upon the understanding through the medium of the senses; the other upon the heart, by means of its best affections and hopes. To know that a revelation is come from God, is one thing; to perceive its divine excellency, and feel its salutary effects, is another.

The internal evidences are also more intelligible to the great mass of Christians. They can understand, indeed, sufficiently, as we have shown, the external evidences. When the case is laid before them on

the testimony of the great body of learned and enlightened men, whom they are accustomed, in all their most important concerns, to trust, they can perceive the general force of the accumulated and uncontradicted facts. Still they cannot receive fully and adequately all the parts of the question, because this requires a preparation of historical knowledge, habits of critical inquiry, and a good acquaintance with the general laws of reasoning and the course of events throughout the different ages of time. But to understand and feel the internal evidences, demands only a sincere and lowly mind. The humblest peasant can discern, in the starry firmament, the marks of the wisdom and glory of God ; though the philosopher alone can demonstrate the laws of the planetary system.

Nor is there any thing more calculated to confirm the faith of young persons, and fix them in the love and obedience of the gospel, than a persuasion of the unspeakable excellency of the matter of it. For, though we ought to receive with implicit belief a revelation which is once proved to have come from God ; yet, such is the nature of man, that he always follows what he considers to be good, rather than what he is merely convinced to be true.

The internal evidences, therefore, are amongst the chief inducements to faith in every age. It is indeed an unspeakable act of divine goodness, first to surround Revelation with the majestic glories of miracles and prophecies ; and to fix immovably our faith afterwards, by the display of all its softer moral beauties of holiness and grace.

Infidelity will never be silenced in Christian countries, till we unite more closely the internal with the external evidences—till we honour God in the excellencies of his revelation—till we make the extrinsic an entrance to the intrinsic proofs—till, having shown men the elevation and proportions of the Temple

from without, we display to them the beauties of its structure and use from within. The two branches of proof leave men, where Christianity when first promulgated left them—convinced of the authority of Revelation by the miracles and prophecies, and then contemplating and adoring the infinite perfections of its contents.

We proceed, then, to consider the first branch of Internal Evidences,

THE SUITABLENESS OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION TO THE OBVIOUS STATE AND WANTS OF MAN AS AN IGNORANT AND SINFUL CREATURE.

Contrivance for the benefit of man, pervades the works of God in creation. The world was made for such a being as man, and no other. The order of the seasons, the necessity of labour and forethought to make the earth fruitful; the warnings—the natural warnings—given us of the consequences of such and such conduct; the prospective arrangements and compensations apparent in the daily order of human events, are parts of God's moral government which are adapted to man, to his accountableness, to his capacities of observation, to his various faculties and powers.

The natural world, also, is suited to his peculiar wants and his means of receiving knowledge: the light is adapted to his eye—the beauties around him to his perceptions of pleasure—the products of the earth, to his various appetites and necessities—the remedies with which nature abounds, to his diseases.

All is adaptation to his circumstances, in the world around him and in the providential government of God: all affects his relation with other men as a moral and social being—all has an influence on the principle of self-preservation, and the pursuit of happiness implanted in his breast by the Almighty.

Man perceives and admires this suitableness: it is

one of the noblest offices of philosophy to point out the particular indications of it. In proportion as these are more clear and express, as they converge from more distant and unlooked-for quarters, and bear more directly upon man's happiness, is the evidence of divine contrivance.

In like manner, it will be found, that in the manner and form of divine revelation, there is an adaptation as clear, as widely spread over all the parts of it, as various and important in its bearings upon human happiness; converging from points as distant and unlooked for, as in the works of the same divine Architect in creation. The book of nature and the book of revelation are written by the same hand, and bear evident traces of the same manner and style.¹⁴ So that as the performances of a great painter are recognized by a similarity of outline and colouring, and by other peculiarities of his art; the books of nature and Christianity are recognized as performances of the same divine Artist, by the similarity of adaptation and contrivance, for the faculties and wants of the beings for whose use they were designed.

The Christian revelation, then, is suited to man, as it speaks A DECISIVE LANGUAGE, and gives repose to the mind in the most perplexing difficulties—as it UNFOLDS THE MYSTERIES OF HIS CONDITION—as it provides A REMEDY FOR ALL HIS WANTS—and as it is calculated FOR UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION.

I. THE BIBLE IS SUITED TO MAN AS IT SPEAKS A CLEAR AND DECISIVE LANGUAGE, AND GIVES REPOSE AND SATISFACTION TO THE MIND OF MAN IN THE GREATEST AND MOST PERPLEXING DIFFICULTIES.

No mark of adaptation can be stronger than the obvious fitness of revelation, in its contents generally,

¹⁴ J. Scott.

to the state and wants of those to whom it is sent. What sort of a book is the Bible? In what sort of manner does it address us? On what kind of topics does it treat? What doubtful things does it compose and settle? What peace does it bring to the mind agitated with conflicting opinions and disturbed with inward remorse? These are the questions which most naturally arise.

The answer is, the Bible determines all the points essential to man's happiness; and determines them with so much clearness and decision, as to exempt him from doubt and fluctuation, and give repose to his inmost desires.

Man was wandering in the darkness of nature. The faint traces of an original revelation were almost lost. Endless disputes without authority, and perplexities without a clue, bewildered him. Nothing was settled, even about the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul, or a future state.

In the midst of this confusion, Revelation comes in and silences, with the authority of a master, "the babblings of science falsely so called."¹⁵ It disputes not, it condescends not to reason with man: it decides. This is exactly what man, after four thousand years of interminable contests, wanted. The authority which revelation claims by its external evidences is thus in harmony with the tone and language which it assumes in its instructions. You are astonished at the display of the miracles—you view with surprise the other proofs of a divine religion. You open the sacred Record. You are assured beforehand that it will be most worthy of the great God from whom it came, though you presume not to say in what manner that will appear. On making yourself acquainted with the contents of it, you perceive that it uses the natural language and style of its divine Author; you

¹⁵ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

seem to hear the very voice of God himself. You feel that the revelation takes the becoming attitude of superiority and command; and addresses you as an ignorant, weak, dependent creature.

This is altogether different from the style of any other book. This is quite distinct from the arrogance of human presumption, as well as from the uncertainties of human reasoning. All is as it should be: God speaks; man is silent—God teaches; man learns—God determines; man obeys.

It is scarcely possible to read a single discourse of the holy prophets in the Old Testament, or of our Lord and his apostles in the New, without feeling that they "speak as those having authority, and not as the scribes."¹⁶

The great principles of natural or essential religion are supposed to be known. The being of one Almighty and perfect God—the creation of the world by him out of nothing—the immortal and accountable nature of man—a future state of rewards and punishment—the obligation of loving, worshipping, and obeying God—the several branches of duty to our fellow-creatures: these principles revelation scarcely ever formally declares, much less stops to prove. It looks on them as known—it considers them as sufficiently established by the works of creation, the fragments of man's moral nature, the tradition of the original revelation, the voice of conscience. It goes on to something further. It proceeds to teach men lessons of its own, which may bring into action these principles of natural religion, clear up their imperfections, and give them a new force and application. Revelation begins where nature ends.

In doing this, revelation preserves an uniform dignity and authority, springing from its innate truth, and bearing the impress of, what it really is, the Great

¹⁶ Matt. vii. 29.

God teaching his creature man. It passes over inferior matters. It deigns not to notice the interests of earth, the politics of princes, the petty projects of legislation. It treats only of the greatest and most important concerns. It is God's book ; and contains nothing trifling, nothing unimportant, nothing superfluous. It speaks of eternity and eternal things. It reveals pardon and grace ; it marks out the ways of peace and holiness. It shows exactly those things which it most concerns us to know, and which we could never understand nor settle of ourselves.

Now all this is exactly adapted to man. He is weak, ignorant, sinful ; distracted with conflicting opinions, and wandering in the darkness and sorrows which his rebellion has occasioned. Still he is accountable. As such, the Scripture addresses him : so that no other creature but man could understand such a book as the Bible.

It is to him, however, the precise Revelation he needs. He finds peace of mind in its authoritative dictates. He feels the ground firm under him. He flies from human conjecture and the intricacies of opposing systems, to repose in the authority of the Bible. Man, when his attention is awakened to the subject, knows in his inmost soul that he wants direction—he knows that to make out truth for himself, in the way of discussion, is impossible. Though, when attacked, he will defend his powers of understanding, and liberty of directing his own path, yet he is sensible of his weakness ; and, when he speaks the real language of his heart, says, “ What I want is a sure and unerring guide.” When Revelation, then, comes to him with the credentials of outward evidences, and speaks to him in the tone of authority and decision, he follows her directions, as those of a friend, and the perturbation and anxieties of his mind about religious truth immediately subside.

A traveller who has lost his way amongst the snows

of the Alps, doth not more rejoice when he meets an experienced guide, who shows him the credentials of his appointment by the lord of the country, and then bids him boldly to follow his steps; than man rejoices, when, bewildered in the mazes of human reasonings, he meets with the authorized guide of life, and, having seen his credentials, is invited to follow him without distrust, till he is extricated from the labyrinth of error and sin.

II. But Christianity is suitable to man, because it **UNFOLDS ALL THE MYSTERIES OF HIS CONDITION, ACCOUNTS FOR THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION OF HIS STATE, AND ADDRESSES HIM IN THIS CONDITION, AND NO OTHER.**

1. If the matter of Revelation be adapted to his ignorance and weakness, because it **speaks** with decision and treats of the most important concerns; it is also equally adapted to his perplexities and anxieties, because it tells him the **MYSTERIES** of his state in this world, opens to him all his character, and explains the whole of his circumstances, difficulties, and miseries. This is a step in the adaptation yet higher and more important, because it touches him more nearly, and is more out of the reach of unassisted reason.

The Heathen philosophy can give no consistent account of man's actual history. It guesses, but it cannot explain. Something it knows of his weaknesses, his sorrows, his corruptions, his tendencies to evil, the contradictions between his reason and his passions—but nothing adequately, nothing distinctly, nothing as to the source and extent of the evil, nothing definitely as to the original purity and subsequent fall of man, nothing as to the Divine image in which he was created and which he lost by sin, nothing of the proper end of man, the enjoyment of God.

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Accordingly, all was contradiction and confusion. The satirists seized some fragments of truth; the poets, the orators, the statesmen, the philosophers, other points. Fables of the golden, silver, and iron ages were framed. Men applied themselves, now to the dignity and love of truth which seemed latent in human nature; and now to the passions and appetites which actually governed and controlled it. Reason and sensual pleasure divided the schools of learning. An unnatural pride and apathy, in opposition to all his tender and social propensities—or a sensual indulgence, which contradicted his aspirations after intellectual and moral excellence, prevailed in the doctrines of the sages.

Revelation comes in and explains every thing—solves the enigma, casts a strong, clear light upon the history of man, tells him all his condition, and treats with him as in that condition, and no other.

The two facts which it reveals—first, the original dignity and uprightness of man, formed after the image of his Creator, and designed for knowing, loving, worshipping, obeying, and enjoying him for ever—and then the fall of man, and the loss of his Maker's favour and image, by sin, with the disorder, blindness, corruption, and rebellion which ensued—these two facts unfold at once all the phenomena.

The loose fabric of human conjectures cannot hold together. Fables about a primeval and a deteriorated state are of no value to mankind. But the distinct and authoritative narrative of the Bible—its account of our first righteousness and subsequent apostacy,—given, not in confused and general terms, but historically, and in detail, with the consequences arising from them, and in connexion with the highest practical purposes—the moment these facts are made known by the Christian religion, all becomes light. There is a congruity in them to the state of man. Many points, indeed, remain unexplained, as we

might expect, with regard to the will and conduct of the ever-blessed God; but the facts themselves are sufficiently revealed for the designs which the Revelation had in view.

2. Now all the APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS are accounted for. For what is so great as man; and yet what so little—what so great, if you mark the occasional traces of his original grandeur—what so little if you follow the prevalent course of his desires and conduct!

What so great as man! How exalted the dignity of his nature above the inferior animals! What a gift is reason! What a distinction, speech! What a thirst he has for knowledge—what a desire after happiness—what a mind, in some faint measure, representing the Deity! Whither cannot his powers extend themselves! What discoveries of science, what inventions in the arts! What a thirst after something which is not found beneath the sun, after a good which has no limit! What enlargement, what constant improvement the soul is capable of! In spite of all his misery, he has a feeling, a sentiment which elevates him, and which he cannot repress. Nothing satisfies his ambition but the esteem of rational and intellectual beings. He burns with the love of glory; he has an idea of a lost happiness which he seeks in every thing in vain. He is a dethroned monarch, wandering through a strange country, but who cannot lay aside his original habits of thought and expectation.¹⁷

And yet what so little as man! What contradictions is this strange creature daily and hourly exhibiting! As to his ends and capacities, he is great; as to his habits, he is abject and vile. His reason is expansive, comprehensive, elevated; and yet his pas-

¹⁷ Pascal.

sions mean and uncertain and perverse. His mind vast and noble ; his desires impure and corrupted ; his dissatisfaction with external things separating him from the earth, and yet his propensities chaining him down to it. His thoughts full of grandeur, but his affections narrow and grovelling. In his aspirations, he rises up to angels ; in his vices, he sinks below the brutes. In his conceptions of futurity, immensity, eternity, he is sublime : in his follies, pursuits, and desires, he is limited, degraded, childish. Thus, man is a maze and labyrinth to himself, full of grandeur, and full of meanness—of grandeur as to his original dignity, as to the image of God, his capacity for religion, his longing for immortality, his thirst of truth, his large designs and projects—and yet low and debased as to his passions, his changeableness, his pursuit of any folly or error, his degrading pleasures and appetites, his delight in sensual things, and neglect of his intellectual and moral nature.

Hence the history of mankind has ever presented the appalling picture of misery, folly, vice, ignorance triumphant, (except as Revelation has supplied a remedy,) notwithstanding all man's powers and desires. He will not part with religion, and yet lives a slave to appetite ; he will not forsake the pursuit of truth, and yet he loves a lie. And whilst apparently advancing towards perfection, he seems also to be sinking into lower depths of debasement. Wars and contests find perpetual fuel in the lusts of men, notwithstanding our experience of the misery they occasion and the unsatisfactoriness of their most fortunate results. The most improvident courses are pursued, in spite of conviction and warnings and example. The same errors are committed as to the nature of true enjoyment, and the means by which it should be pursued, which have been acknowledged and lamented in all its former generations. The improvements in

the sciences and arts are no sure omens of the diminution of moral delinquency.¹⁶

3. Now what can be a more striking proof of adaptation to the state of man, than this development of his contradictory feelings and pursuits in every part of Revelation, and AN ADDRESS TO HIM UPON THIS FOOTING, and no other?

The Bible would be suited to no other creature but one fallen from so great a height and sunk into so deep a gulf. It is in this state it supposes him to be. It is in this state it proposes to him all its discoveries. It calls to him as an accountable being, as having a conscience, the viceroy of the Almighty; as capable of eternal happiness, as formed for knowing and serving God, and as destined to undergo a divine judgment—and yet it takes him up as he actually is, a fallen and depraved creature, accuses him of his sinfulness, calls him to humiliation and penitence, reminds him of his continual weakness, and makes him dependent for every blessing on the grace and mercy of God.

Thus, as the physician proves his skill and experience in treating the complicated diseases of his patients, by telling them all they feel, and explaining the source of their sufferings, anticipating their description of them, reconciling the apparent contradictions of their story, and suggesting new points which they had not recollected—doing all this in a thousand cases, and with invariable truth of observation. So the Bible proves its claims to the confidence of men, by discovering all the secrets of their malady, opening to them the unobserved depths of their heart, and telling them the history of their contradictory feelings and desires, however little suspected by themselves.

III. But further, the Bible provides a REMEDY

¹⁶ Bishop J. Bird Sumner.

FOR ALL THE WANTS OF MAN;—which though surprising and incomprehensible in many respects, yet is in other views most exactly suited to his reasonable and accountable nature, and obviously adapted to his wants and necessities.

This is, in fact, the peculiar point of suitableness in Revelation. Every thing else would be inferior, distant, uninteresting, unless as connected with this. The Bible not only speaks with authority, and opens the whole of man's state, but, having done this, provides an adequate and most surprising remedy.

If man be in the weak, fallen, ignorant condition, which we have described; then the suitableness of a Revelation is only another word for the suitableness of the remedy which it makes known.

Now, no other religion ever proposed to him any distinct and efficacious relief. What did heathenism pretend, with its contemptible deities and its unmeaning ablutions and rites! It was calculated, no doubt, to fall in with the universal impression on man's heart that he needed some guide for divine worship, and some atonement for sin; but it gave no specific information, and offered no adequate succour.

The prominent discovery of Revelation is, that pardon and grace, light and strength, hope and joy, life and salvation, are made known in the mercy of God our heavenly Father. A dispensation of grace by the Son and Spirit of God is the glory of the gospel, and constitutes it those "good tidings of great joy"¹⁹ which precisely suit the extreme misery of our state.

This remedy is adapted for man in this important respect, that it not only prescribes a rule of duty, but provides for the pardon of former transgression, and furnishes strength and motive for future obedience. This is altogether new and peculiar to the Christian

¹⁹ Luke i. 14.

religion. Other religions prescribe, invite, threaten—but this pardons, renews, changes the state and disposition. Other religions deal with man on the footing of his own powers, and make the best they are able of his circumstances—Christianity brings in a new power, creates new circumstances, gives new life and feelings and pursuits, reveals new and divine agents for effecting man's salvation, presents a foundation of forgiveness in the sacrifice of Christ, opens a way for obedience in the direct help and aid of the Holy Spirit.

All this is so congruous to the precise exigencies of man, as to constitute a summary argument, requiring no detail of proof, of the divine origin of Christianity. It so completely answers the case—it so meets the very necessities and desires which men in every age have expressed, though incapable of devising any means of satisfying them, that it carries along with it a perfect conviction of its truth.

It is true, this remedy is most surprising and incomprehensible in many respects—but this does not lessen its suitableness nor its admirable efficacy, as it is practicably fitted for the relief of man's wants. It is surprising, it is stupendous, as we shall have to notice in our next lecture. But the Revelation being clearly admitted on its undoubted external testimony, all the matter of it rests on the truth of that God that cannot lie; and the subsidiary proofs, from the suitableness, in some respects, of its mode of supplying our wants, are in no way lessened by its stupendous or incomprehensible character in other points of view. For there are not wanting topics of observable suitableness to the reasonable and accountable nature of man, in the application of this great remedy.

1. The gospel works by proposing ADEQUATE MOTIVES. It opens to man all his real danger, and excites fear. It proposes divine encouragement, and inspires hope. It sets before him the terror of judg-

ment, and the joys of heaven ; and awakens correspondent anxiety and apprehension of consequences. It invites man to repentance and salvation, by presenting to him new truths, new facts, new assistances, new prospects. All is intelligent motive, addressed to a reasonable being. The stupendous redemption, in its pardon and in its grace, places him in a situation, and discloses to him circumstances, which move and actuate his determinations and efforts.

2. Further, it places man in a new and more favourable STATE OF PROBATION—a state wholly different from that in which he was before the revelation of Christianity, because then a hopeless degeneracy rendered his condition on earth, not so much one of probation, as of gloomy forebodings and dark despair. But now man is by the gospel raised to hope, and is called on to follow the bright prospects opened before him. Invitations, warnings, calls to repentance, denunciations against pride and unbelief, proposals of reconciliation, are addressed to him. He is told that his state hereafter is to depend on his manner of passing this probation, receiving these offers, and accepting this salvation. In short, just as God's natural government places him in a state of probation as to the duties and happiness of this life ; so does the dispensation of the gospel, as to spiritual and eternal blessings.²⁰

3. Then it proposes to man a SYSTEM OF MEANS adapted to his powers and faculties. He is to obtain grace and help in the use of certain methods of instruction, appointed for that end, by Almighty God. The reading of the holy Scriptures, the public and private worship of God, the sacraments, the formation of habits, abstinence from scenes of temptation, the society and converse and example of the pious ; these, and similar things, are the means which Christianity

sets before him. Into the design of this system of means he must fall. He can obtain no grace, no divine aid, no relief, no pardon, no renewal of mind, no direction, no comfort, except as he heartily and humbly places himself in the attitude of a diligent disciple. This is altogether and most remarkably adapted for such a creature as man, and precisely agrees with all the dealings of God with him in his general providence, where little is accomplished but by the intervention of means.

God, indeed, acts according to his own merciful will, in the ways of religion, as in the operations of nature and the works of providence. He gives grace, he awakens the minds of men, he disposes of events as he pleases. But all this is designed to bring us to use the means of religious improvement, which we were neglecting. Every extraordinary operation of mercy falls into the system by which God ordinarily works.

4. These methods of Almighty God in the application of the gospel, entirely agree with **THE OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES OF MAN, IN THIS WORLD.** Every thing around us corresponds with this particular plan.

The world is so presented to man, his duties so arise, his trials so embarrass, his social affections so excite him ; he is exposed to that interchange of peace and trouble, of dissatisfaction and repose, of solicitation and forebodings—that he is manifestly in a state of things adapted to this probationary operation of the gospel and this system of means. All is unintelligible without the facts of the great remedy of salvation in its moral working—all is clear and consistent with them.

5. Once more. The remedy we are considering, both in its stupendous features, and in its method of operation, is calculated to **DRAW OUT TO THE UTMOST ALL THE POWERS AND FACULTIES OF MAN.** It ad-

dresses his heart ; it works upon him by the discovery of immense love in Almighty God giving his own Son for him. It presents God as a father in all his benignity, his grace, his pity, his long-suffering.

Now nothing can fully unlock the powers of the human heart but love—whatever addresses powerfully man's affections. in connexion with the discovery of elevating truth to the understanding, raises him to the utmost effort—terror drives him in upon himself—gratitude and love draw him out into voluntary and persevering enterprise.

Now the remedy of the Bible restores man by presenting God as a father, a friend, a compassionate and gracious sovereign, stooping with infinite condescension to succour and save his creature.

Thus all the faculties of man are carried out to the utmost. He has the very thing proposed to him which suits his nature, which excites his whole soul, which makes him most active and energetic in the noblest of all pursuits.²¹

6. Thus it CARRIES HIM ON TO HIS TRUE END—an end, not narrow and earthly and debasing—but the highest, the most pure, the most ennobling that can be conceived—an end which man never could have discovered, and which nothing but the divine condescension and grace in redemption could have devised or made practicable. It makes the ever-blessed Creator the end of his creature—it presents God as the centre of felicity. It sets before man the pursuit of God's favour, the preparation for the enjoyment of God, the hope of a state permanent, exalted, glorious—as the end to which he must direct all his powers ; and, in doing so, the gospel falls in exactly with his nature and its capacities as originally formed by the divine wisdom.

What an adaptation, then, appears in this peculiar

²¹ Erskine.

discovery of Revelation. A remedy of any kind, and working in any way, would make the Bible suited to man—*suited* is too weak a term—a remedy would make the Bible the glorious, joyful tidings of salvation to man. But the remedy is yet enhanced in all its bearings upon him, when, though stupendous in some views, it yet, in others, meets his reasonable and responsible nature, works by motives, places him in a state of probation, proposes a system of means, corresponds with his actual situation in the world, draws out all his faculties, and carries him on to his highest end.

IV. But further, the Bible is adapted for man, because it is CALCULATED FOR UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION UNDER ALL THE ENDLESS DIVERSITIES OF HIS STATE AND CHARACTER; and this as well in matter as in manner.

For when we turn from considerations like the preceding ones, which relate to the Christian religion in its most general aspects, as speaking with a tone of decision and authority, as unfolding all the difficulties of our situation, and as discovering an adequate and surprising remedy for our misery; when we turn from all this to a view of Christianity in the form of its communications—when we ask, Is the religion suited to man generally; man in all ages, man under all circumstances; in a word, is it meant for universal diffusion?—we find that, both in the MATTER and MANNER of Revelation, there is a remarkable correspondence with the state and wants of the whole race.

1. For as to the MATTER, it has little in it that is peculiar, exclusive, local, temporary. Its last dispensation, the Christian, is not, like the religion of Paganism, or the imposture of Mahomet, modelled for a particular people, and the vices and habits prevalent amongst them. It is not even like the limited and introductory religion of Judaism. It is adapted for

man, as man, in the essential powers and faculties of his nature. It is suited for him every where, and under all circumstances, by the authority of its dictates, by the discovery of all his wants, by the magnitude and efficacy of its salvation, by the clearness and force of its evidences, by the simplicity of its worship, by the brevity of its records.

It especially consults the case of the poor—that is, of the vast majority of mankind; the class most pressed by affliction, most in need of means of instruction, most numerous, most neglected, and even scorned by all preceding religions—which philosophy overlooks, because it has nothing essentially beneficial to propose, and no plain and important discoveries to offer. To the poor the Saviour came; amongst the poor he conversed; to them he preached the gospel; their state he consulted. The Bible elevates the intellect, enlarges the powers, increases the happiness of the poor, without flattering their vices or concealing from them their duties, or lifting them out of their station. The institution of a day of repose after the interval of six days' labour, for the worship of God, for the contemplation of his spiritual, and the preparation for his eternal, relations and destinies, is an unspeakable blessing, displays the suitableness of Revelation to the powers of man, needing recreation and rest both for body and mind. No attempt was ever made for raising the character and situation of the poor, without inspiring pride or relaxing the bonds of domestic and civil subjection, but by the gospel.

The Bible is suited to all orders of intellect; like the works of nature, where the humblest artizan can trace some of those wonders, which the greatest philosophers cannot exhaust. The child meets with what suits his opening capacities; the old and experienced, that which gives tranquillity and peace to age.

Then it follows all the improvements of mankind in learning and science, in philosophy and the arts;

and keeps above and beyond them all—opens its treasures as man advances in capacity for searching them out, is illustrated and confirmed by every solid acquisition in human knowledge; meets and suits the mind of the savage emerging into civilization; and yet soars far above the intellect of the scholar and the divine in the most refined advances of society. Like all the works of God, it is adapted to men in every stage of improvement; and the more it is studied, the more do the topics of admiration multiply.

There is also a completeness in the Bible for its proper end. All that man's necessities, as to practical knowledge and present aid, require, you find there; all the circumstances, all the duties, all the emergencies, of man are consulted. It is completely fitted for him; having no omissions, no redundancies, no defects, no provisions nor directions forgotten or left out.

And yet, with all this suitableness to mankind in all ages, and under all circumstances, it seems to address each individual in particular. The truth of the description, the exact fitness of the doctrines for man, are such that every one thinks his own case consulted. "The Bible," says Mr. Boyle, "like a well-drawn portrait, seems to look every beholder full in the face." In fact, it is the book made for man: not for man in this or that age, of this or that class, of this or that order of intellect, but man universally, on the footing of those capacities, wants, feelings, which are common to the whole race.

2. Nor is the FORM in which God communicates truth in the Scriptures, less fitted for us than the matter.

The style is plain and simple. There is nothing of science, nothing of human research, nothing of artificial eloquence. It is above all this. It abounds with figures and metaphors the most simple, the most beautiful, the most intelligible, the most congruous.

Medicine and agriculture, as Lord Bacon observes, are the chief sources of the Scripture images—sources open to man universally.

The perspicuity of the Bible makes it level, in its main instructions, to the most untutored mind, as well as the most refined; whilst the depths contained in its mysteries, and the occasional difficulties of its allusions, exercise and surpass the greatest powers. The variety of matter in the Bible is such as to excite and reward the diligence of every inquirer.

It is the most brief, and yet the most full and copious of writings; the most brief, because it passes over, for the most part, all inferior matters; the most copious, because it dwells at great length on important ones. Two thousand years are compressed into fifty short chapters; whilst that abridged history expands into the most minute details of the family scenes of some of the patriarchs.²² Indeed, it delights in domestic narratives, and thus touches the very heart of man in his earliest youth. Who has not wept over the history of Joseph, and felt the deepest compassion at the affliction of Job?

It teaches very much by great facts and a few powerful principles, applicable to ten thousand particular cases, without danger of mistake from any individual; and yet it occasionally enters into the detail of the application of them, to assist the hesitating mind. The method of our Lord's teaching, as we shall see hereafter, was the best adapted to man of any ever yet discovered for conveying instruction.

The large portions of history, biography, prophecy, devotion, mixed with each other, and interwoven with doctrines the most important, go to involve truth in man's habitual feelings, and convey it clothed in its most attractive forms and applied to real life.

The human style and manner in which the divine

²² Genesis—Abraham, Jacob, Joseph.

inspiration appeared, following the cast of mind of each writer, and allowing him the freest use of his natural powers,²³ makes the Book the book of man—popular and affecting. The light of the natural sun is not more adapted for the human eye, than the records of Revelation for the mind and powers of man.

It is, however, important to observe, that Christianity, in all this scheme of adaptation, **CONNIVES AT NO ONE VICE**. It is not in agreement with the vicious inclinations and perverted will of man; but it is suited to man in the proper use of the term; to man as originally formed and destined for eternity; to man as weak and fallen, and needing restoration and grace. It never bends to him, it never flatters him. It is fitted, not to certain passions of man, for certain purposes, and in a certain way—no proof of imposture could be more sure—but to the whole character of man in all the parts of his moral constitution, with the direct view of remedying and healing what is corrupted and diseased in him. Heathenism, Mahometanism, Infidelity, are adapted to man, so far as they suit his corrupt passions and flatter his pride. Christianity is suited to him in a higher and more appropriate sense—to his original capacities, to his actual state of want and sorrow, to his eternal destinies; to bring him back to the first, to deliver him from the second, to prepare him for the third.

It is to be noted, further, that **THIS ADAPTATION DOES NOT STRIKE THE MIND IN ALL ITS PARTS AT ONCE**; but appears after a period of consideration and reflection, and in proportion as we are in a right state for judging of it.

Some parts, indeed, force themselves upon our view at the first contemplation; for instance, as Revelation restrains man, gives him a law, reveals his relation to

²³ See Lect. XII. and XIII.

Almighty God, and refers him to an eternal judgment. But the main peculiarities of Revelation do not strike him at first. The principal features and many of the details of Scripture doctrine, precept, and history, would not have occurred to him as proper to be made universally known. Man would not have drawn the picture of human nature so dark ; he would never have dared to lay open the recesses of the human heart ; he would not have left so much undiscovered of the ways of God ; he would not have adopted such a familiarity of style and illustration ; he would not have exposed the perverseness of the chosen nation, nor the falls and infirmities of the saints. He is revolted at much of this at first. The Revelation is not the sort of record he would have expected. Man would have preferred something more grand, more showy, more specious, more free from mystery. He would have had a Revelation more noble and elevated, according to human judgment.²⁴

Such, however, is not the wisdom of God. Regardless of human prejudice, he has given a Revelation really, though not in all its parts apparently, adapted to man. Divine wisdom leaves man to find this out by observation, by experience, by the knowledge of his own wants and weaknesses. By degrees he perceives that God is wiser than he : at length he acknowledges the adaptation of every part ; the necessity of what he thought less needful ; the depth of what he deemed to be superficial ; the dignity and condescension of what he considered too familiar ; the suitableness of what he condemned as peculiar or dangerous.

Again: this adaptation, running through the whole contexture of Revelation, was not contrived in these later ages, but is a PROSPECTIVE SCHEME FORMED BY THE WISDOM OF GOD, AND REVEALED PERFECT

²⁴ Miller's Bampton Lect.

AND COMPLETE AT ONCE, to be developed and admired as occasion served, and new exigencies brought to light its innate congruity.

Human legislation is retrospective ; it is grounded on the experience of the past : when it attempts to reason *à priori* on the future, its plans are miserably defective, and soon become inapplicable. Divine Revelation knew what was in man from the first, and provided for it with unerring care.

The Bible was not written after the arts and sciences and civilization had opened all the sources of natural knowledge. No. You must take your stand with Moses, one thousand five hundred years before Christ, and conceive what was the prescient wisdom which adapted his writings to man living at a distance of three or four thousand years. You must go back, with David and Isaiah and Malachi, and then estimate the evidence arising from the suitableness of all their writings, not only to their contemporaries, but to men of all times. You must imagine yourselves in the company of apostles and evangelists—fishermen, tent-makers—and consider whence they had that wisdom, which one thousand eight hundred years have served only to illustrate. An adaptation extending so wide, and appearing more and more as our experience enlarges, and which yet was infused into the original composition of the Revelation, ages before the occasions could arise for developing it, marks the Divine hand from which it came.

Let it be observed, finally, as THE APPLICATION of the whole subject, that as all this argument rests on the particular circumstances and wants of man—is a consideration of the suitableness of Christianity to his obvious state in this world, therefore,

THE POINT OF VIEW FROM WHICH TO BEHOLD THIS OBJECT ARIGHT, IS FROM THE MIDST OF HUMAN WEAKNESS, MISERY, AND SORROW.

The Bible professes to be a remedy for sin and guilt, for darkness and fear, for forebodings of futurity, and dissatisfaction at earthly sources of happiness. So long as you think yourself not of this number, the gospel is not capable of appearing to you in this branch of its evidence, at least in the most striking and important parts of it, as emanating from a Divine hand.²⁵

I must send you back to the external proofs, or allow you to dwell on those palpable and lower points of suitableness which the authority and the morals of the Christian religion present.

When you begin to feel aright—when, from the external evidences and the general view of the adaptation, you are led to enter practically upon the business of your salvation, to read what the Bible says of your state, your duties, your danger, your obligation to Almighty God, your violation of that obligation a thousand and a thousand times—when you begin to compare those statements with your actual state, and to pray in earnest for grace and direction; that is, when you know and feel your real condition, then will this argument rise upon your view. You will feel the need of an authoritative guide to decide upon what is truth; you will feel the exact correspondence between the description of the Bible and your own state; you will perceive the magnitude and appropriateness of the remedy which it reveals. Thus you will stand in the right light to catch the beauty and perfections of Revelation, which, if you view it from a false position, will present only a confused mass of unmeaning forms.

I appeal to those devout Christians who are best capable of judging of what is suited to man in all the extent of his wants.—Tell me if you do not find the Scriptures adapted to all your exigencies. Tell me if

²⁵ Bishop Sherlock.

this does not give it a direct, practical authority in your judgment. Tell me if there is not a completeness in the Scriptures which meets every varied case under all imaginable circumstances. Tell me whether, as life flows on and your experience widens, this suitableness doth not appear more and more evident. Tell me whether new views of it do not open upon you, as you arrive at new points of prospect in the journey of life. Tell me whether, in the seasons of affliction, in the times of awakenings of conscience, in the moments of reflection upon your past life, in the conflicts of anxiety and the forebodings as to eternity;—tell me whether, as you ascend the hill, and approach the lofty summit, and command a wider prospect and a clearer and more unclouded horizon, you do not behold more distinctly the adaptation of Christianity to your state and wants, to the real relation of things, to your fears and sorrows, to your most important interests. Tell me, in fine, whether the confirmations arising from this source, do not give to the proofs arising from external evidences a softness and richness of persuasion, a power of communicating repose and peace to the mind, a perception of the excellency and fitness of the remedy of the gospel, which endears it to your heart, and raises to a demonstration your assurance that it is indeed the Revelation of God.

LECTURE XV.

THE EXCELLENCIES OF THE DOCTRINES OF
CHRISTIANITY.

1 JOHN iv. 8—10.

God is love ; in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love ; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

HAVING considered the general suitableness of the Christian Revelation to the obvious state and wants of man, we come now to point out the excellency of its doctrines ; that is, of the leading truths which are made known to us on the authority of the religion. Some of these relate to the being and perfections of the Deity, and others to a stupendous scheme which he has been pleased to reveal for the redemption of man.

Here, then, the propriety of the limits to which we have confined the internal evidences becomes obvious. For of the counsels of the incomprehensible God, what can man, abstractedly speaking, know ? Of the various methods of his dealings with his creatures in

their fallen state, what can human wisdom, of itself, determine? On such subjects we are silent; and having received the divine communications on the ground of external testimony, we receive the doctrines as converts and disciples, and accept the Revelation itself as an authority for what it contains.¹

Having done this, we are in a condition to trace out various indications of glory and excellency in the doctrines thus admitted, or rather in certain parts of them; and these indications furnish a source of important subsidiary evidence.

Let us, then, first enumerate, in this view, the CHIEF DOCTRINES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION; and, secondly, point out the particulars in which SOMETHING OF THEIR DIVINE EXCELLENCY MAY BE PERCEIVED.

In doing this, it will be impossible not to touch on some of the points noticed under the adaptation of Christianity, in its most general sense, to the wants of man; for the doctrines are only the details of that subject. At the same time, a wide distinction in the conduct and results of the argument will appear.²

I. I propose to review the chief doctrines of the Christian religion.

1. The first relates to the BEING, PERFECTIONS, AND PROVIDENCE OF THE ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD. The Bible begins here. It teaches us that

¹ Davison.

² A more serious difficulty arises from the necessity of employing terms and referring to doctrines which suppose a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and some general acquaintance with Christianity in its chief details. This difficulty attends every branch of the internal evidences, but peculiarly the consideration of the doctrines of Revelation. It will be lessened as the student advances in his inquiry—and with regard to the great body of young people whom I have especially in view, and who have been instructed from infancy in the Christian religion, it scarcely exists.

there is one eternal, self-existing, and all-glorious Being, who created the world out of nothing, and who is the sovereign, the proprietor, the preserver, and the Lord of all things.

The UNITY of this ever-blessed God, in opposition to the idols of the heathen worship; and his GLORIOUS PERFECTIONS, BOTH ESSENTIAL AND MORAL, in opposition to the vices, and passions, and prejudices, by which the pagan deities were described as actuated, are the first elements of revealed truth.

The glory of our God is his HOLINESS—that combination of all his moral attributes, of justice, truth, faithfulness, purity, love, wisdom, which constitutes the perfection of his character; and to which the essential attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, are subservient.

With this is connected the exercise of his ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY, his dominion over all, his “doing according to his will,” as the prophet speaks, “in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;”³ his working all things,” as the apostle terms it, “after the counsel of his own will.”⁴

The PROVIDENCE OF GOD is that constant operation of his power by which he accomplishes his designs. To this never-failing care nothing is great, nothing little. It more particularly concerns itself with the affairs of men, and orders with a paternal regard the minutest concerns of the church and the world.

The HOLY, JUST, AND GOOD LAW OF GOD, by which his reasonable creatures are ruled, follows,—that law which is the transcript of the divine perfection as to its purity and goodness; and which is as equitable as it is holy; demanding nothing but what man, created in his Maker’s image, was adequate to perform, and which he would have found the purest happiness in accomplishing.

³ Dan. iv. 35.

⁴ Eph. i. 11.

Such is the scriptural character of God, not one trait of which was completely known to the Heathen nations. Their deities were worse than ordinary wicked men—full of ambition, malice, cruelty, lust, deceit. One was the god of thieves, another of war, a third of wine. Their histories are histories of crime and chicane, of pride and contention. Their supreme Jupiter is never introduced, but in the form of human folly, with human vices, and engaged in criminal human pursuits.

The Bible is the only book which lays the foundation of religion in the unity, perfections, and sovereignty of the self-existing Jehovah. The Bible is the only book that introduces the great God speaking in a manner worthy of himself, with dignity, authority, sovereign majesty ; whilst his condescension in using a language adapted to our comprehensions, and borrowed from our manner of perceiving things, only deepens the impression of wisdom and grace which is left upon the mind.

2. From the unity and holiness of God flows the next important doctrine of Revelation, THE GUILT AND CONDEMNATION OF MAN AS A TRANSGRESSOR AGAINST HIM.

The Bible teaches the extent of human apostacy, by teaching the character of the God whom he has offended, and of the law which he has broken. Heathenism had only some faint and partial views of man's sinfulness ; it had lost the very notion of sin as committed against the majesty of God. The Christian Revelation opens the whole doctrine, as dependent on the two facts of the original innocence and of the fall of man, which we noticed in the last lecture—it states, that “ by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin”^s—it declares that men are corrupt and depraved, guilty and helpless—it details man's weak-

^s Rom. v. 12.

ness and apathy as to spiritual things, the blindness of his understanding, the perverseness and rebellion of his will, the alienation of his heart from God and goodness.

It treats him as a sinner, accountable, indeed, and with some fragments and traces of a moral nature, and capable of restoration by the grace of God in redemption ; but in-himself impotent—unable to offer any atonement for his past offences—unable, because unwilling, to return to his duty to God—without knowledge of divine truth, without strength, without a right determination of the will—without any means of devising or entering upon a way of deliverance.

This description of the guilt and folly of man is widely different from that given in any other book, and yet it is the only account verified by experience and the evidence of facts. Every other statement is contradicted by the history of all nations, contradicted by the precautions in every political enactment, contradicted by the daily judgment which each man is compelled to form of others. And the more any one will watch his own motives, intentions, imaginations, and desires, the more clearly will it appear to him that the Scripture gives a far more just account of himself, than he himself could have done.

It is here important to remark, that Revelation did not create this state of misery and guilt ; it merely describes it according to the truth of the case, and in order to an effectual cure. The state of things is the same, whether Christianity be true or not. The facts remain the same. Deism and the natural government of God are as much open to objections on this ground as Revelation⁶—but Revelation, finding man in this fallen condition, makes known the cause, declares the extent and consequences of human guilt, and then presents a remedy. And the conscience of every in-

⁶ See Lect. XXI.

dividual, when duly informed of the decisions of Revelation, responds to the charge, and discerns in its own case the truth therein communicated. This doctrine of man's guilt, and of the consequent penalty of God's violated law, is one of the peculiarities of the Bible. Upon this all its addresses proceed—this is the state which is taken for granted, as sufficiently proved by the voice of conscience in the culprit, and the relation in which he confessedly stands to an almighty and infinitely holy Creator and Judge.

3. And thus the way is prepared for the stupendous discovery of **REDEMPTION IN THE INCARNATION AND SACRIFICE OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD.**⁷

The grand and all-important doctrine of the Christian religion is this, that “God so loved the world,” sunk in the guilt and ruin of sin, “that he gave,” as the free act of his infinite benevolence, “his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁸ A discovery this so astonishing in all its parts, as to absorb and overwhelm every other, and to form the grand centre around which the system of Christian truth revolves.

The incarnation of the Son of God by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary—the state of humiliation upon which he thus entered—his life of sorrow, reproach, ignominy—his bitter and unutterable sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane, before the bar of Pontius Pilate, and on the cross—his death by the most cruel, lingering and servile punishment of crucifixion, constitute that meritorious

⁷ For Revelation makes known a plurality of persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—of whose mode of subsistence indeed it gives no information, but whose offices in the economy of redemption it considers essential to every part of that dispensation; whilst the doctrine is so stated as to be in no respect inconsistent with the unity of the divine essence.

⁸ John iii. 16.

obedience and all-perfect sacrifice, by which sin is expiated, God reconciled to his rebellious creatures, and the Holy Ghost vouchsafed for the renovation of the human heart.

The proper vicarious nature of these sufferings, in the place and stead of the transgressor—the substitution of the divine Surety and Redeemer, in the room of the guilty culprit—the atonement thus made to the moral righteousness of the great Governor of all—the display of that righteousness, so that God may now appear “just and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus,”—these topics prepare for THAT GREAT DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ONLY, which is the leading truth of the whole gospel, as the incarnation of Christ is the commanding discovery, and his meritorious death the great vindication of the divine holiness. This justification includes the remission of sins, and the being accounted and treated as righteous before God ; and is followed by acceptance, adoption into his family, and the hope of everlasting life.

The exaltation of the Son of God to a state of glory and dominion, as mediator, at the right hand of the Father—where in our nature he sits, “angels and principalities and powers being made subject to him,”¹⁰ till he shall come the second time to judge the quick and the dead—concludes and shuts up the doctrine of redemption ; a doctrine this, which is peculiar to Revelation in a sense more strict than any of the preceding. For the unity and perfections of God might be faintly “understood by the things that are made”¹¹—and the guilt and ruin of man have been in some measure felt and acknowledged in all ages—but the doctrine of redemption is a discovery as new as it is momentous—the great end, as it is the brightest glory, of the Christian religion.

⁹ Rom. iii. 26.

¹⁰ 1 Peter iii. 22.

¹¹ Rom. i. 20.

4. The doctrine of THE PERSONALITY AND OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, follows upon the preceding ; and is a part, or rather a consequence, of the redemption of Christ. For the Bible reveals a comforter and sanctifier, as well as a redeemer and saviour. The Holy Ghost, the third person in the Godhead, (for the tri-unity of the ever-blessed God seems only revealed so far as man's salvation is concerned,) is the divine agent in the sanctification of man. He makes effectual to its true ends the love of God our heavenly Father, and the grace and sacrifice of Christ our great Redeemer. He abides with the church for ever, as its advocate, comforter, teacher, guide, sanctifier. It is by him the Holy Scriptures were indited, as we showed in the Lectures on the Inspiration ;¹² and it is by him the understanding of man is illuminated rightly to receive those records. His operations, secret to us, accompany the ministry of the word of Jesus Christ. These influences are not generally distinguishable, except in their effects, from the acts of our own mind. They stimulate the decisions of conscience, they assist and strengthen and inform the judgment ; they gently and gradually sway the determinations of the will ; they thus cure the distempers of the soul, and enable man to receive and use aright the records of the sacred Scriptures.

The renovation and new creation of man after God's image ; his regeneration ; his being restored in some measure to his original uprightness ; his being re-cast, as it were, and made over again by a heavenly birth ; his transition from spiritual death to spiritual life and activity—or, what is the same thing in other terms, his being formed to a love and pursuit of holiness, to a choice of spiritual things, to a hatred of sin as sin, to supreme love to God and Jesus Christ his Saviour, to resignation and acquiescence in God's holy will and

¹² Lect. XII. and XIII.

sovereignty in providence and grace—in a word, his being trained to that peculiar kind of life which springs from gratitude and love, and produces the fruits of all good works—this mighty change, by the power of the Holy Ghost, is the grand operation attributed to that divine person in the Christian system.

5. The doctrines of THE SACRAMENTS AND THE OTHER MEANS OF GRACE AND INSTRUCTION may, perhaps, not appear, at first, of sufficient importance to accompany the prodigious discoveries of the preceding topics ; and yet, so far as man is concerned, they are so essential to a right reception of the peculiar truths of Revelation, as to demand a brief notice. For the immense blessings of redemption are not merely revealed, but a subordinate system of means is connected with them. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are appointed visibly to represent and seal ; and convey, in some measure, to those who receive them rightly, the grace of God and his consolations of pardon and peace of conscience ; as well as to be a bond of union and a badge of mutual faith amongst Christians. The spiritual repose of the sabbath ; the ordinances of public prayer and preaching ; the study of the Holy Scriptures ; the labours of an order of men appointed for the religious instruction of mankind, are all means of grace—the use of which means, connected with exertion on our part in every branch of practical Christianity, with watchfulness, resistance against temptation, and continual private prayer and self-examination, brings down Christianity to the immediate conscience and duty of man, whose reasonable and accountable nature is thus consulted, in the midst of the glories of the redemption which would seem to overwhelm it.

6. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LAST SOLEMN JUDGMENT, with a consequent state of endless happiness or misery, close the summary—truths these, familiar to us from our infancy, and often

admitted by the Deist, and even claimed by him as the dictate of natural religion ; and yet which reason never could discover of herself—never clear from distracting doubt—never establish upon just principles—never prevent from being lost in vague and superstitious fables. Revelation alone settles the question—asserts the resurrection of the body—makes known the final judgment—declares the person of the Judge—prescribes the rules on which his decision will proceed—gives a specimen of the conduct of that last assize—and pronounces the endless punishment of the ungodly, and the everlasting felicity of the righteous.

What discoveries these !—that this world is only the preparation for another—that man's life here is only the first stage of his long and immeasurable journey—that all our actions have consequences unutterably momentous—that a final judgment will arrange all the inequalities of the present initiatory state—that all the parts of the divine proceedings, now incompletely revealed, will be harmoniously displayed before all the assembled intelligences of the universe—that fallen angels and men will be judged in righteousness, (conscience being the chief witness,) and be allotted to the several states of happiness or misery for which they are severally fitted, as well as judicially and most justly assigned by the voice of the omnipotent Judge.—What a scene ! What consequences !

When our Lord uttered that one sentence, “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation,”¹³—he pronounced a doctrine, which for clearness, for importance, for new and decisive authority, for influence upon the conduct of man, is

¹³ John v. 28, 29.

unparalleled by all that philosophy or natural reason ever taught.

Such is Christianity in her main doctrines. Let us then proceed to point out,

II. The particulars in which their DIVINE GLORY AND EXCELLENCY MAY, IN CERTAIN RESPECTS, BE PERCEIVED. We observe, then, that,

1. These doctrines ALL EMANATE FROM THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS DRAWN IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. They flow from that assemblage of glorious attributes—from that infinite holiness and goodness which the Revelation ascribes to the one living and true God. All the heathen deities are corrupt, and the corrupters of their followers. The character of their gods is ignoble, vile, contemptible; their vices and follies weigh down their religion, degrade all their ceremonies, infect the elements of their worship.

The heathens sustained their superstitions as well as they could, notwithstanding the character of their deities. Conscience, tradition, political ends, served to bear up the mass of superincumbent absurdity and vice. In Christianity, all depends and rests with its whole weight, on the infinite holiness and goodness of the Almighty Jehovah. It is the character of our God from which all our doctrines emanate; the guilt of man is what this ineffable purity teaches as an inevitable consequence; the mighty work of redemption agrees with the unspeakable love and benevolence of his moral attributes; the gift of his own Son, and the mission of the Spirit, when revealed, are seen exactly to become the divine compassion and grace.

Man has ever been found to bear a resemblance to the object of his worship. In Christianity, the one true God surpasses in purity all his creatures, is the infinitely excellent object of love and imitation, and draws man upwards to holiness and obedience.

This holiness of God penetrates every part of the

religion, sustains it, gives birth to its details, demands and renders necessary its provisions, and constitutes its excellency and glory. It is this which is the spring of all the virtues of Christian worshippers. The more the attributes and works of God—his sovereignty, his law, his providence, his gift of a Saviour, his promise of the Holy Spirit, his declarations of a future judgment—are considered, the better and holier men become. The glory of the Lord is the sum and end of every thing; the first source and final cause of all purity and all joy.

2. There is, in the next place, a **SIMPLICITY** in the doctrines of Christianity which forms a part of their excellence. They may be summed up in three plain and obvious points: the corruption of man; the reconciliation of man to God; and the restoration of man to his original purity and dignity;—points so simple, that human nature, in all ages, acknowledged them in her feeble manner, or rather guessed at and desired them. The fall she could not but perceive and feel at all times; a way of atonement by sacrifice she ever wished for, but wished for in vain; a source of strength and consolation she breathed after, but knew not whence it must flow. Revelation comes in. Its doctrines are found to embrace the very points after which nature fruitlessly panted. Thus simple is her system—the fall and the recovery of man embrace every thing.

And not only so; these doctrines rest on a very few prominent facts, which are first established, and then employed for the purpose of instructing us in the doctrines. The corruption and guilt of man is a doctrine resting on the fact of the transgression of our first parents. The incarnation, from which the doctrines of justification and sanctification are consequences or uses, is a fact. The existence and operations of the Holy Spirit are facts of practical and universal application in every age.

This simplicity of the Christian system is in remarkable contrast with the confusion and complication of the theories of men, which, resting on no positive facts, are vague and unsubstantial. Like the works of creation, Christianity exhibits an artless simplicity in the few and prominent facts on which it is built ; so totally different from the clumsy and artificial productions of man.

3. But there is at the same time A SURPASSING GRANDEUR AND SUBLIMITY in these doctrines, which that very simplicity the more illustrates. It is simple, indeed, as referring to a few points, and resting on certain facts ; but these points are so infinitely important to man, and these facts are so grand and stupendous, that it is impossible for the human mind fully to grasp them, even when revealed. All is stupendous in redemption ; the divine persons engaged in contriving and executing it ; the length of time during which it was preparing ; the gradual announcement of it for four thousand years ; the glory and difficulty of the Saviour's enterprize in accomplishing it ; the mysterious union of Deity and humanity in his person ; the force and number of the enemies overcome, especially his conquest over the malice and power of the great spiritual adversary ;¹⁴ the blessings which his redemption procured ; the eternal consequences dependent on its acceptance or rejection ; the holy angels, the messengers and ministers of it, and the eager inquirers into its manifold wisdom—all give it a greatness and excellency becoming the infinite majesty of the divine Author of our religion. Every thing is little, mean, limited, uninteresting, worthless, compared with THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS

¹⁴ The Revelation makes known the existence and agency of angels ; both of those who fell, and of those who kept their first innocency.

OUR LORD.¹⁵ The value of the soul of man, and the depth of its fall, are best known from the astonishing method of recovery here revealed. A God incarnate, a God humbling himself, a God interposing, bleeding, agonizing, for man his creature, is a fact of such grandeur and majesty as to be quite beyond the command and faculty of the human mind.

As the vastness of the universe, the more it is discovered and traced out, heightens our conception of the glory and power of God—worlds upon worlds—systems upon systems—the starry heavens, an assemblage of suns, each surrounded with its planetary attendants—till the mind is lost in the contemplation. So the magnitude of redemption overwhelms the mind; the greatness of one part pressing upon another; calculation defeated, and imagination exhausted in pursuing consequence after consequence, till faith itself toils in vain to follow out the Revelation which it can never fully comprehend.

4. But the HARMONY of all its parts, and the manner in which it is represented, stamps a divine authority upon the Christian doctrine.

Like the stones of a well-constructed arch, every part of the doctrine of Revelation is not only essential to the rest, but occupies the exact place which gives union and stability to the whole. The different doctrines cohere. They all unite in the guilt and corruption of man, and in the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. If any one part be taken away, the remainder becomes disjointed and useless. For what is the doctrine of redemption, without that of the fall? or that of the fall, without the doctrine of redemption? And what is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, unless sustained by both the preceding? And what is the infinitely holy character of God, if separated from the other doctrines, of which it is the key-stone—

¹⁵ Phil. iii. 8.

the essential, primary part, which knits the whole arch together?

Redemption displays, also, in combination and harmony, all the divine perfections in undiminished, yea augmented glory. To exercise mercy and grace in accordance with all the ends of justice; to pardon, and yet to express the utmost abhorrence of sin; to unite truth in the same act with compassion; to display a manifold wisdom in the way of reconciling the ends of a holy legislation with the salvation of the sinner; to exhibit all the divine perfections in one scheme which shall obscure none, and yet give to mercy the occasion of "rejoicing against judgment,"¹⁶—all this is the evidence of a harmony truly divine.

Nor do the representations of this scheme fail to give the just impression of this beautiful accordance. All the sacred writers unite in the great outline. It runs through the Bible. The same view of man, and his sin and guilt; the same view of God, and his glorious sovereignty and perfections; the same view of Christ, and his person and sacrifice; the same view of justification and acceptance before God; the same view of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, of the means of grace, and the hopes of glory—pervade every part of the Scriptures. The degrees of light cast on the details of the scheme differ, but the main principles are the same. Isaiah develops and confirms the writings of Moses;¹⁷ Paul attaches his doctrine of justification to that of Abraham.¹⁸ Abel's offering is celebrated in one of the last of the apostolical epistles.¹⁹ Every thing is accordant and consistent, as becomes a divine Revelation.

Contrast with this harmony the contradictions of Infidelity and Paganism. "In the mythology of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and in the fantastical legends of India, China, or Japan, we find many frag-

¹⁶ James ii. 13. ¹⁷ Isaiah li. 1, 2. ¹⁸ Rom. iv. ¹⁹ Heb. xi. 4.

ment of Scripture history blended with fictions of the most extravagant kind; but nothing solid, coherent; nothing which indicates one superintending and controlling mind pervading the whole.”²⁰ In Mahometanism I need not say there is no connexion or consistency in the system itself. The Bible alone contains a clear, uniform, harmonious representation of religious doctrine, of man’s fall and recovery, of this world and the next, of time and eternity.

And this argument is stronger, if we recollect the different ages when the sacred penmen lived, and their number and diversity of talents and character. Nothing is more rare than a consistent statement of a few facts of contemporary history. Constant experience teaches us, that in the representation of religious doctrines, discrepancies continually occur. If only three or four writers compose a few different works on any given subject, the disagreements will be endless. But here, in the Bible, we have more than thirty various authors, composing between sixty and seventy different works, living, some fifteen hundred years before the Christian æra, and some a hundred years after: of all the various classes of society—kings, legislators, prophets, magistrates, captains of armies, fishermen, tent-makers—some of whom compose history, some poetry, others devotional exercises; some biography, others hortatory epistles; whilst a large number deliver prophecies, uniting exhortation and warning with predictions of future events;—and yet they all agree; a harmony runs through all their productions on all the great subjects of revealed truth. And this in a continued series of writings for sixteen hundred years, in a country which has scarcely before or since produced a single author of eminence, but which began and finished its literary course with this wonderful succession of harmonious and accordant books. Such

²⁰ Bishop Van Mildert.

a proof of divine contrivance speaks for itself, and is irresistible.

"I can no more believe," says Bishop Gastrel, "the whole Christian scheme an imposture of mere human contrivance, than I can believe that all the materials which composed the city of Rome met together and put themselves into form. For as I cannot see what should give these material a determinate motion towards the building of that city; no more can I comprehend what should influence or determine a man to frame and contrive such a history and religion as the Christian. And as it is impossible to believe that, if all the materials necessary for the building of Rome had by some extraordinary motion been carried to that place, they would have fashioned themselves and fell into that exact form we find that city built in; so, likewise, is it equally impossible to conceive that, if there was an end or motive in nature sufficient to determine a man to invent such a religion as the Christian, he should have made and contrived it, in all its parts and circumstances, just such as it is delivered to us in the Scriptures."²¹

5. But the divine excellency of the Scripture doctrines appears in their MEETING ALL THE NECESSITIES OF MAN, AND YET PROMOTING THE ENDS OF GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT.

The manner in which the Christian Revelation meets the exigencies of man, we noticed somewhat particularly in our preceding lecture,²² and we have alluded to it in our present. What further, then, can be necessary to be said on the details? What more need be stated on the doctrines of the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit, as meeting the wants of man—his want of merit, his want of strength—his want of knowledge, his want of happiness? It is the peculiarity of Reve-

²¹ Bishop Gastrel, in Bp. Van Mildert's Lectures.

²² Lect. XIV.

lation that it provides a remedy for all our misery ; and it is the peculiarity of that remedy, to be applicable to the precise bearings of our case. Nor are the other doctrines of the being, and perfections, and law of Almighty God, and of the guilt of sin, and of the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, less adapted for the exigencies which man's ignorance of God, of himself, of a future state, and of the grounds of the final sentence, present.

This is the obvious excellency of the Scripture doctrines, that they altogether provide a complete and most surprising recovery for man from the ruins of the fall ; restoring him to the favour of God by the immense blessing of forgiveness, and to the moral image of God by the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

But how, it may be asked, can the same acts promote the special ends of God's moral government, to which they seem rather to be hindrances, or at least exceptions ? They do so in various ways.

The great propitiation of Christ magnifies the law of God, by sustaining the penalty of it ; whilst his previous obedience honoured all its precepts. Never was the inseparable connexion between sin and misery so exhibited as in the cross of Christ. Never was the holiness of God and his hatred of moral evil so manifested. Never was the honour of the divine government and its inflexible purity so demonstrated.

Nor does the way in which the blessing of pardon is to be received less clearly promote the same ends. For what attitude must man assume when he applies for the benefit ? That of a culprit ; that of a penitent, vindicating God and condemning himself ; that of a rebel, returning to his allegiance, and admitting the equity of the law which he has violated.

And what must follow on his justification ? A life of obedience, from gratitude and love ; the necessity

of which is not lessened, though the place it occupies is of course, from the whole scheme of salvation, changed. And does not this obedience, from a principle of love, vindicate and promote the ends of God's holy government, when it is produced by the grace of redemption, in those who were before open transgressors and rebels ?

Again : what is the very faith which justifies, but a holy principle, the source of all future obedience ; though in the act of justification it is only as the hand which lays hold of the Saviour's merits ? And what are the grace and operations of the Holy Spirit, but a spring of renewed love and subjection to God ? And what are the manifestations of the last judgment, but the proofs of moral and religious character in man, displayed before the assembled universe ?

Thus admirably are the necessities of man supplied, on the one hand ; and the ends of moral government, in the dispensations of the Almighty, established triumphantly, on the other : whilst the union of those apparently contradictory points illustrates that divine wisdom which pervades the whole doctrine of Revelation.

6. This impression will be strengthened if we consider that the revealed doctrines are at once **DEEPLY HUMILIATING AND IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE CONSOLATORY**. The peculiar truths of the Bible are, indeed, most humiliating :—they lay man low ; they strip him of his fancied righteousness, and imagined power ; they empty him of the conceit and self-dependance with which he swells. A salvation by grace, a justification by faith ; a sanctification, the seeds of which are implanted by the Holy Spirit, and all the fruits of it matured by the same divine comforter—all this is most humiliating. Then the partial discoveries which the doctrines of Revelation make, oppose the pride of man's understanding : partial, not as to their

practical uses, but as to the whole compass of them, the various consequences which flow from them, and many circumstances with which they are connected.

The mysteries of Scripture, again—which is only another word for man's ignorance—humble man : mysteries as to the purposes of the Almighty ; mysteries as to the manner of the divine subsistences in the holy Trinity ; mysteries as to the entrance of moral evil ; mysteries as to the union of the two natures in the person of Christ ; mysteries as to the operations of grace in accordance with the accountableness and efforts of man—these and other points, impenetrable to the human understanding, are no doubt most humiliating.

And yet, under the circumstances of the case, and as connected with the abundant consolations which flow from them, they prove the excellency of the very system which they seem to obscure : for had not this scheme been far beyond human capacities and discoveries, it need not have been revealed. And in a communication from the all-comprehending mind—the infinite and eternal God—mysteries are the natural and necessary result of our limited faculties. How can man comprehend the whole will, and the manner of subsistence, and the modes of operations of the glorious Jehovah ? That a divine Revelation should, in some respects, be clothed with incomprehensibility, is one proof of its divine origin. I say in some respects ; for the doctrines of Revelation are not mysterious in all their parts. The statements and facts are clear and intelligible ; it is only in modes and essences that incomprehensibility is involved. As in the works of creation, though we cannot penetrate to the hidden nature of things, and in that view all is mystery ; yet we can discern traces enough of a divine hand, to adore the unsearchable goodness and wisdom of the great Architect and Author.

Nay, the very humility which these obscurities tend

to produce, is one mark of the divine excellency of Revelation; because the malady of man was pride, which these are especially calculated to cure.

And, then, WHAT SOURCES OF CONSOLATION are opened in these mysterious truths! Where is there a spring of comfort to man, which does not rise from a doctrine surrounded in some view with impenetrable darkness? Whence any peace of conscience but from the mysterious sacrifice of the cross? Whence the disposition and power to repent and seek God, but from the mysterious influence of the Spirit? Whence the softest consolations of the heart in trouble, but from the mysterious communion of God with the soul? And what is there so consolatory as that incarnation of the Son of God, which is shrouded with the deepest darkness? It is in this mystery that are involved the condescension and pity of the Almighty. It is here that the invisible God becomes tangible, as it were, and perceptible to man. It is here, that the distance and dread which sin has interposed, are removed.

In short, the one stupendous act of the love of God in the gift of his Son, which is the distinguishing truth of Christianity, is so incomparably consoling, and at the same time so humiliating, as to form, from this united impression, the strongest evidence of its divine glory and excellency. It is here the restorative character of revealed truth rises to the highest point—that all is shown to be summed up in an exhibition of divine love—that every thing else is seen to be only preparatory to this, or consequent upon it. This is the epitome of the Christian doctrines. Redemption is the manifestation of the character of love in the ever-blessed God. The incarnation is, so to speak, LOVE ITSELF MADE MAN; whilst the operations of the Holy Ghost are a diffusion of the same divine love.

How does this consideration raise these internal

evidences ! how does it invest them with a matchless excellency ! how does it render the very mysteries which result from the infinite condescension of God, in taking our nature upon him, a part of the proof of their divine origin ! how do the very depths of darkness, with which we feel ourselves surrounded in certain points of view, enhance the consolation which flows in a full tide upon the soul, from the practical effects and tendencies of the doctrines which arise from them, and which guide and illuminate our path !

And here we might close the argument of this Lecture ; but there remains one additional point of great weight, illustrating the whole of what we have been observing, and elevating the proof to a yet loftier height. For, besides these separate marks of glory and excellency in the Christian doctrine, we would call your attention to the **MAGNITUDE AND SUBLIMITY OF THE GREAT DESIGN OF ALMIGHTY GOD, OF WHICH THEY ARE THE RESULT.** A plan, formed before the ages, is revealed in the Christian Scriptures. Its greatness and sublimity may be judged of from the compass it takes, the position it occupies, the effects it has produced. This stupendous project of redemption appears immediately after the fall, and is pursued to the close of the divine canon ; it involves in its course all the operations of a wonderful providence—all the miracles and prophecies of both Testaments ; it proceeds onward still to the present hour ; nor will it cease its progress till its grand consummation, in the conversion of the world and the glories of the latter days, and the giving up of the mediatorial kingdom to God, even the Father, “ that God may be all in all.”²³

This adds incomparably to the whole evidence of

²³ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

inward excellency in the Christian scheme. It is not merely a method of redemption emanating from the divine character, simple, sublime, harmonious, advancing the ends of moral government, deeply humiliating and consolatory—but it is a scheme forming part of a plan devised before the foundations of the world were laid, for the redemption of man from sin and misery by the Son and Spirit of God—a plan, of which the brief outline and pledge was given in the first promise of “the seed of the woman”²⁴—a plan which the institution of sacrifice, the separation of Seth’s posterity from that of Cain, the destruction of the old world, the covenant with Noah, the dispersion of Babel, and the calling of Abraham, were the first means of promoting—and which the sojourning of the chosen family in Egypt, their deliverance by the hand of Moses, and the dispensation of the law, with all its typical institutions, still further advanced²⁵—a plan which is the commanding principle of the whole Revelation—the clue which guides through all the mysterious dealings of the Almighty. The judges and kings, the princes and prophets; the sacred books of the different æras of the church; especially the divine prophecies from the first voice of Isaiah to the last accents of Malachi—all subserved this vast project, which unlocks, like a master-key, every part of Scripture. This comprehends all the miracles and prophecies which we considered in former Lectures.²⁶ This gives a unity and grandeur and importance to the doctrine of redemption, which heighten inconceivably its excellencies, and speak the divine hand from which it came.

The very conception of such a plan for accomplishing such holy benevolent ends, by means so extraordinary, and running through all the ages of time,

²⁴ Gen. iii. 15.

²⁵ Van Mildert.

²⁶ Lect. VII., VIII., IX.

could never have entered any finite mind. The declarations of its general purpose, given four thousand years before the incarnation,—which, standing between the former ages and the present, is the grand fact uniting all the dispensations of the Almighty,—could never have been made by man; or, if made, could never have been accomplished. Only an infinitely wise God could have formed such a project, stretching from the creation to the consummation of all things; and only an omniscient and omnipotent Being could have promised and effected the gradual accomplishment of it.

Man's plans are earthly, contiguous, narrow, variable; incomplete. Man's plans are, like himself, feeble and limited in project, low and debased in pursuit, partial and unsatisfactory in result. The plan of redemption is, like its Author, spiritual, exalted, uniform, extensive, successful. The plan of redemption is the centre around which, from the beginning of the world, all the works of providence and all the dispensations of grace have been revolving. The parts of the design which we see, are only a small division of the whole, and may assume, in our view, the appearance of disorder; but all is one glorious and consistent purpose. Time moves on, and fresh events develop something more of the roll of the divine will relating to it. We are yet in the midst of the unaccomplished series. The facts of the incarnation and of the supernatural propagation and preservation of the gospel in the world, assure us of the fulfilment of the whole design; whilst the manifest state of the world and the church seems anxiously to wait for the blessing.

The very grandeur and consistency of the accomplished parts of this plan declare its author; and, when considered in connexion with the pure and benevolent object of it, the infinite contrivances apparent in its several divisions, and the divine interferences manifest in its progress, would of itself form a decisive,

independent proof of the Christian Revelation. But when this is joined on upon the vast mass of the external evidences, and is viewed only as a subsidiary proof, to a mind already convinced of the truth of the religion (which is the exact position which the internal evidences occupy,) the force which it possesses for confirming our faith is utterly irresistible. It wants no learning, no criticism, no long study, to perceive the energy of such an argument. Science and learning, indeed, are very important when duly employed, and on no subject more than religion. But the commanding truths of Christianity are open to all, just as its mysteries are incomprehensible to all. The glorious orb of day is not a more immediate and irrefragable proof of a beneficent and all-wise Creator, than THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, as our Saviour is termed by the holy prophet,²⁷ is of the truth of the Christian religion. And as the poorest and most illiterate peasant can feel the warmth and light and joy which its rays diffuse, as gratefully as the most learned philosopher, (though he cannot speculate upon the theory of light or the laws of the planetary system;) so can the humblest disciple as distinctly perceive the glory and excellency, the vital warmth and light and joy of the Sun of Righteousness, as the most profound Christian scholar, though he cannot detail the historical proof of it, or defend his religion by argument.

But, as in the case of the natural sun, no glory in the object can be perceived by him who wants the faculty to discern it; so can no moral excellency in redemption be perceived by him who has a mind darkened by pride and prejudice and habits of vice and worldliness. He wants the faculty. He must be directed to that preparatory work of self-observation, submission to the external evidences of Chris-

²⁷ Mal. iv. 2.

tianity, acceptance of all the contents of the religion on the authority of the religion itself, study of these contents on their own principles and by their proper light, prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit—in order that his mind, being purged and strengthened, may be able to discern “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.”²³

Much of what we have stated cannot but appear strange, inconsistent, extravagant to the unpractised and uninstructed mind of man in his natural darkness and prejudices, and making only some guesses at Revelation, as a blind man of colours. It is enough if we direct him to those introductory studies which shall lead him to the full light of truth, if honestly employed. The elements of every science must be first learned, before its last and noblest discoveries can be even conjectured, much less comprehended or judged of aright. Nor doth this ignorance at all lessen the real glory and excellency of these discoveries, as perceived by the humble and experienced disciple.

I appeal to every such disciple, WHETHER THE INWARD EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, FROM ITS PECULIAR DOCTRINES, does not rise brighter and brighter upon his view, as he can enter into the practical uses and bearings of them, and can dismiss from his mind the intrusions of forbidden curiosity. I ask whether every year doth not add something to his deeply-seated conviction of the infinite love of God in the gift of a Saviour for the redemption of man? I ask whether the divine character from which all the doctrines of Revelation emanate—the simplicity and yet grandeur of those discoveries—their harmony—their illustration of the glories of God’s moral government—their humiliating as well as consolatory tendency, do not pour a flood of light upon his mind; do not fall in with all his conceptions of congruity and

²³ Phil. iii. 8.

fitness in a divine proceeding, and strengthen all the results of external evidences? I ask him whether, when he can most clearly disembarass himself from matters of speculation, and, relinquishing *à priori* reasoning, can repose most entirely in the practical uses of divine truth, he does not most forcibly feel its elevating, sanctifying, consoling effects?

Yes; this is the result of the whole subject which we have been reviewing,—the exhibition of the divine character of love in the gift of a Saviour invariably produces A CORRESPONDENT LOVE AND GRATITUDE TO GOD ON THE PART OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN—the love of God to man is calculated, is designed to call forth man's love to God in return. Love to God is the natural consequence of such a display. Just as danger is calculated to excite fear; and proposed good, hope; and unexpected deliverance, joy; so such love, on the part of God, is calculated to excite the love of admiration and gratitude and repose, in the breast of man.²⁹

And thus a divine excellency shines forth, not only from the separate characters of the doctrines of Christianity—not only from the great design formed before the ages, of which excellency they are the expressions; but also in THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS AND RESULTS OF THE WHOLE, in man's obedient and grateful love to God, and devotedness of heart to his service.

Thus does Christianity elevate and ennoble man, aids his mental powers, gives him sublimity of thought and conception, raises him in the scale of moral and intellectual being, touches all the springs of his purest affections, and unites the lofty discoveries of the incarnation, with that practical love and obedience, in which they have their proper effects and consequences.

LECTURE XVI.

THE UNSPOTTED PURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN
MORALS.

 TITUS ii. 11—15.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

WE proceed next to consider the unspotted purity of the Christian morals, for the purpose of impressing more vividly on the minds of the young, the internal excellency of Revelation.

In this branch of our subject we have two advantages.

It is more level to the comprehension of man than the preceding topics. The doctrines which we con-

sidered in our last Lecture, are in themselves matters of pure Revelation. Not so the morals. Here we are in some measure at home. For though Christianity lays down the rule of them in a new extent and purity, employs her own means to make them practicable, connects them with her revealed doctrines, and enforces them with her peculiar sanctions; yet the precepts themselves are intelligible to man, address his conscience, fall in with all his convictions as an accountable creature, and have been, in many of their branches, acknowledged in every age and in every part of the world.

A second advantage is the confessions of unbelievers; who with one mouth are compelled to admit the beauty of the Christian morals. They object, indeed, as we might anticipate, to some of the details of them; and they have no real desire, as we shall show, to promote the interests of morality. But their acknowledgments are therefore the more important, when they allow that "the gospel is one continued lesson of the strictest morality; of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity,"¹ and when they declare they would preserve Christianity, for the sake of its moral influence on the common people.

With these points in our favour, let us consider—
THE EXTENT AND PURITY of the Christian morals.
The manner in which they are RENDERED PRACTICABLE. **Their INSEPARABLE CONNEXION** with every part of the Revelation, and especially with its peculiar doctrines. And the **SANCTIONS** by which they are ultimately enforced.²

¹ Polingbroke—Herbert, also, Shaftsbury, Collins, Woolston, Tindal, Chubb, applaud the Christian Morals. Hume and Gibbon admit the same.

² The text contains a summary of each of these particulars:—1. The extent and purity of the gospel precepts; *Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts—live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world—zealous of good works.*

I. The **EXTENT AND PURITY** of the Christian morals will appear, if we consider that,

1. They embrace **all** that was really good in the **ETHICS OF HEATHEN SAGES**, and in the dictates of natural religion; and re-enact them with greater clearness and authority. The scattered fragments of moral truth which original Revelation, or the responsible nature of man, or the labour and study of philosophers, have dispersed up and down the world, are found to be comprehended in the Christian code. Truth, justice, fortitude, integrity, faithfulness, chastity, benevolence, friendship, obedience to parents, love of our country, and whatever else is praiseworthy, have all their place; only cleared of base admixtures, directed to their proper ends, and clothed with necessary authority for swaying the conscience.

2. There is, in the next place, a **COMPLETENESS** in the Christian code of precepts. They insist on every virtue and duty for which man was originally formed; and forbid every vice and sin contrary to his real relations and obligations. There is nothing wanting as it respects man's intellectual or moral powers; nothing omitted of the duties which he owes to himself, to his neighbour, and to Almighty God: nor is there any thing impure or debasing intermixed with its code. All is holy and consistent; in opposition to the **Heathen and Mahometan morals**, where

2. The manner in which they work. *purifying unto himself a peculiar people.*

3. The connexion with the doctrines of Revelation:—*The grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us. Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.*

4. The sanction:—*the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, to judge the quick and dead; and in what the closing words of the passage imply; These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

whatever is good itself, is lost amidst the pernicious usages with which it is incorporated.

3. Then the Christian morals erect the only true and unbending STANDARD OF DUTY to God and man ; a standard so high, and yet so reasonable ; a standard so unknown to any other religion, and yet, when revealed, so obviously agreeable to the sovereignty of the ever-blessed Creator, and the relation in which man, the work of his hands, stands to him ; a standard so intelligible to the meanest capacity, and yet so far surpassing the imagination of the highest, as to have the strong impress of a divine hand upon it. Yes ; when our Lord uttered those memorable words, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”³—he raised the true and intelligible standard of morals, which places even a child in a Christian country far above, in this respect, the greatest moral philosophers of the ancient or modern world.

4. It follows from this, that the Christian code OMITTS MANY FALSE VIRTUES of heathenism, and INSISTS ON MANY REAL ONES unknown to it. Christianity rejects from its catalogue of virtues, vanity, pride, the love of fame, jealousy of honour, resentment, revenge, hatred of enemies, contempt of the low and miserable, self-confidence, apathy under suffering, and patriotism in the sense of pushing conquest and upholding the interests of one nation to the hatred and injury of others ; and she inserts humility, meekness, the forgiveness of personal injuries, self-denial, abstraction of heart from earthly things, sympathy with the poor and mean, renunciation of confidence in self, cheerful resignation under affliction.⁴

³ Matt. xxii. 37—39.

⁴ The form of the argument from the mere purity and clear-

5. Indeed, the Christian religion chiefly dwells on the MILD AND RETIRING VIRTUES, in opposition to those which are of a more hardy and obtrusive character. She omits not, indeed, courage, vigour of resolution, eagerness of zeal, fortitude, perseverance, contempt of danger ; but she dwells chiefly on lowliness, patience, silent and meek returns for ill usages, gentleness, compassion, allowances for the prejudices and failings of others. It is a consequence of this, that she founds her code on humility and self-denial, though she avoids moroseness, austerities, and whatever might verge towards melancholy and misanthropy. By laying man low, and giving him a just impression of his unworthiness before God and man, and then, by teaching him to “ deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” she fixes the only firm foundation of consistent morality, and especially of the milder virtues. But whilst all other religions, when they attempt this, fall into foolish and absurd injunctions, severities without reason, privations which vex without purifying man, Christianity is as lovely as she is self-denying. She is friendly, and tender-hearted, and full of the social and domestic affections and sympathies.

6. Once more, the Christian religion requires an **ABSTINENCE FROM THE PROXIMATE CAUSES OF**

ness of the Gospel morals, is thus illustrated by an able American writer :—“ There are certain primary principles of jurisprudence, beneficial to mankind under all circumstances. But no actual system of human jurisprudence has recognized such principles, and such alone. Every where private cupidity, political ambition, ecclesiastical or professional superstition, prejudices of education, old habits, personal interests, encumber municipal law with idle forms, unmeaning distinctions, &c. If a code were to be presented professedly from heaven, and if it were found on examination, to embody all that was excellent in human laws, to avoid imperfections, to supply deficiencies, to suit every form of civil polity, and all understandings, &c., would such a claim be without foundation ?”—Verplank.

EVIL, and demands what is right in motive and intention, as well as in the overt act. Human laws chiefly deal with the manifest action, when capable of proof. They argue back very feebly to the intention, which they still do aim at reaching as they can. The divine law lays the restraint upon the intention, the first element of the moral nature of man ; the divine law considers nothing to be virtuous, unless the motive as well as the material action be right ; the divine law regulates the inward wheels and structure, of which the outward movement is the indication ; the divine law demands an abstinence from every appearance of evil, from the proximate causes of crime, from the scenes, the places, the books, the persons which create the temptation. The divine law forbids doubtful indulgences, questionable pleasures, the approach towards the line of demarcation between virtue and vice, and bids men cultivate a decided intention and study of obeying God.

7. Accordingly, Christian morality regards all outward forms of devotion and piety as MEANS TO A HIGHER END, and as only acceptable to God when connected with that higher end. In this it stands opposed to all false religions, which invariably connive at the substitution of ceremonies and ablutions, for moral duty. What should be the end of religion is lost in the means. Christianity knows nothing of such compromise. "Bring no more vain oblations," is the remonstrance of the Lord by his prophet with the hypocritical people of his day—"incense is an abomination unto me ; your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me ; I am weary to bear them."⁵

8. Further, the Christian precepts all hang together and AID EACH OTHER ; and, indeed, are necessary the one to the other. This is a mark of a divine

⁵ Isaiah i. 13, 14.

system. The morality of the Gospel coheres, depends each part on every other, and springs out from a few main principles. Humility is essential to self-denial, and both to benevolence and compassion : these last are indispensable to the love of our neighbour as ourselves ; and all are required to subdue rancour, envy, ambition, hatred : and when these are subjugated, the mild and retired virtues flourish ; whilst the same genuine love to our fellow-men keeps them from falling into moroseness, and from being leavened with misanthropy. And thus the completeness of the Christian code, and the high standard which it erects, answer to the beautiful harmony of the various particular graces in the actual character of the Christian disciple.

9. For this is the last remark which I offer under this head. The Christian morals go to form a PARTICULAR SORT OF CHARACTER, of such excellence as no other system of ethics ever aimed at. Some of the separate duties of the gospel were not unknown to heathen philosophy ;—fortitude, chastity, truth, justice, equanimity, the doing to others as we would they should do unto us, &c. ; but the extent and purity of the Christian morals appear, as in the other points already mentioned, so especially in this, that they go to form a character perfectly attainable, and yet altogether new and lovely—a character in which humility and self-knowledge are so interwoven with meekness, spirituality, disregard to earthly things, denial of selfishness in all its forms, prompt and sympathizing benevolence, active zeal in advancing the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind, patience under sufferings, forgiveness of injuries, persevering effort in every good word and work, as to form a temper and conduct so excellent and praiseworthy, and yet so unknown to heathen moralists, as to stamp upon Christianity the seal of its heavenly origin. And this is the more remarkable, because Christianity considers

all separate acts of virtue as essentially defective, unless they are directed to the formation of this very character, and are adorned with—what is completely understood to be the summary of moral excellence—the Christian spirit and temper.

II. But it may naturally be asked in WHAT WAY DOES THE GOSPEL PROCEED TO MAKE THESE PRECEPTS PRACTICABLE—what is the course she pursues—where does she begin, and what plan does she recommend to her disciples?

1. Christianity, then, **BEGINS WITH THE HEART OF MAN.** This is implied in many of the preceding remarks. She forms the lives of men by forming their dispositions. She implants every principle deep in the soil, lets it take firm root there, and thus bring forth fruit, wholesome, seasonable, abundant. We call all this Christian morals, from the common language of mankind; but the truth is, it is holiness, obedience to God, **SPIRITUALITY**; which as much exceeds what unbelievers call morality, as a living man surpasses a picture.⁶ No other religion but that of the Bible takes cognizance of the heart; and yet that is the place where all effective morals must begin; and therefore, no other religion but that of the Bible pursues the wise and practicable course. Other morals end in theory; Christian morals lead to solid and positive action.

2. In the next place, the gospel aims at achieving its object **BY THE FORMATION OF HABITS**, which are a second nature, or rather, the effect of that new nature, which, as we saw in our last Lecture, and shall soon see again, Christianity infuses. It works not by occasional impulses, or by acts without principles; but by principles carried out into acts, and thus creating determinate and holy habits—the only way to

⁶ And. Fuller. Gospel its own Witness.

operate, effectually and permanently, so far as we can judge, on a creature like man ; in whom repeated acts, whether of corporeal skill, intellectual effort, or moral virtue, produce a facility by repetition, and recur on the recurring occasion with augmented ease, and with less labour of reasoning and delay in comparing opposing probabilities. It is thus the racer (both in a natural and spiritual sense of the word) acquires vigour in his course, the wrestler in his struggle, the soldier in his combat, the scholar in his discipline.⁷ Holy habits result in the formation of what we mean by CHARACTER, which is the end Revelation has in view in its morals.

3. Christianity, further, directs men to aim at THE VERY HIGHEST ATTAINMENTS, WHILST SHE ENCOURAGES THE WEAKEST EFFORTS. Never did any religion but the Christian lay man so low in abasement and self-humiliation, and yet at the same time raise him to such a height of holy pursuit, and cheer him with such encouragements under his weakness and failures. Thus it unites every thing requisite in the moral machinery which is to operate upon man. It applies a mighty lever, so to speak, which lifts him up from the depths into which he was sunk, and places him on the elevated course where he is to run his race. It says to him, " Be ye holy as God is holy ;"⁸ and then adds, " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁹ It bids man aim at the standard of supreme love to Almighty God, and of love to his neighbour for God's sake ; and yet assures him that it will not " break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax."¹⁰ It never says to him, ' You have done enough, you have attained 'a sufficient measure of holiness ;' and yet it never says to him, ' Your faulty efforts are un-

⁷ Butler, Horsley, &c.

⁸ Lev. xi. 44. 2 Pet. i. 15, 16. ⁹ Matt. xi. 29, 30.

¹⁰ Isaiah xlii. 3.

acceptable, your imperfect beginnings are useless.' In short, it animates the advanced disciple to higher attainments, and condescends to the infant scholar in his incipient efforts: it never lowers its standard, on the one hand, nor discourages the feeblest essays, on the other; but unites the loftiest aim with the most genuine humility in the temper of its aspirants: and thus carries the clearest testimony within itself of a divinely-inspired code.

Again: Revelation works its practical precepts by **KEEPING ALOOF FROM SECULAR POLICY** and inferior ends. There is a superiority, a freedom from low objects and concerns and partizanships, a separate and elevated and undeviating purpose in Christian morals, which exempt them from the scuffle of human passions and local ambition. There is no trimming, no time-serving, no eye-service, no acceptance of persons, no yielding to the interests of this or that party, of this or that individual; no subserviency to petty projects or human contrivances; nothing like the schemes of heathen morality, where all was made to bend to state policy and the ends of national aggrandizement. Christian morality knows nothing of this. She teaches rulers and subjects their mutual duties; but in terms applicable to all governments and every form of polity. She ever keeps in view, not the interests of a favoured few, but the general welfare and salvation of mankind as the creatures of Almighty God.

Christianity sets men to work, also, by delivering her code **IN THE FORM OF MAXIMS, AND CLEAR, DECISIVE PROHIBITIONS**, rather than by systematic treatises reasoned out in detail. Thus she is brief and intelligible. The ten commandments, who cannot remember? The vindication of them, in the sermon on the mount, from the false glosses of the Jews, who cannot understand? The exposition of the Christian temper, in the twelfth chapter of the Romans, where

is the heart which does not feel? The picture of charity, in the thirteenth of the first of Corinthians, is familiar to a child. The maxims of the book of Proverbs are in every mouth. Revelation, thus, does not reason as a philosopher, but commands as a lawgiver. We observed this in a former Lecture ;¹¹ but this is the place for applying the remark to the morals of the Bible. Revelation utters with sententious authority her brief determinations, as occasions require, in popular language, for the understanding of all ; and leaves man to collect, as he can, her maxims into systems, or compare and illustrate them by the aid of sound reason and conscience. Human treatises on morals stop to define and prove every duty, to contrast it with its proximate defect and excess, and to reduce the whole to an elaborate system. Revelation takes for granted that man knows what temperance, chastity, fortitude, benevolence mean, or may learn them from other sources, and contents herself with binding them on the conscience. The consequence is, that a child at school in a Christian country knows more of the standard of morals, and the details of social virtue, than the most learned of the ancient sages.

Allied with the preceding observation is the remark, that the gospel works its moral system by setting every thing forth by **STRONG AND AFFECTING EXAMPLES**. This, like almost every thing else in this fruitful subject, is peculiar to Christianity. All its precepts are illustrated and embodied in the historical parts of the Bible. All the separate virtues, duties, graces, acts of abstinence and self-denial, effects of the Christian spirit, and of its principles carried out into habit and character, are set forth in the lives of Christ and his apostles.

All the infirmities and errors and vices to be shunned, are exposed in the fearful punishments of guilty nations, in the destruction of the cities of the plain,

¹¹ Lecture XIV.

in the deluge, in the captivity of Babylon, in the lives of wicked princes—Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, Jehu, Nebuchadnezzar. With this view, also, the sins and falls of the true servants of God are held forth for our caution, with a fidelity unknown except in the inspired Scriptures—the drunkenness of Noah, the incest of Lot, the falsehoods uttered by Abraham and Jacob, the irritated expressions of Moses, the sin, the gross and awful sin, of David,¹² the rashness of Josiah. And in the New Testament, the infidelity of Peter, and the dispute between Paul and Barnabas, to say nothing of the accounts of the ignorance and dulness of our Lord's disciples, and of the corruption of some of the converts in the first churches ;—these examples deter from vice by exposing it in its darkest colours, and by marking the severe judgments of God which followed his most holy and sincere servants in consequence of it.¹³

I do not dwell on the examples which hold forth the duties of parents and children, of masters and servants, of husbands and wives ; nor on those which

¹² A lesson this of the greatest moment to princes, as showing the connexion of the grossest transgression of the seventh commandment, with the concerted and aggravated breach of the sixth.

¹³ The attempts made by infidel writers to misrepresent the purport of some of these narratives are too absurd to be noticed. The tendency of the scriptural exposure of vice is to excite abhorrence ; to which the plainness and brevity of its descriptions, and even the directness of the terms which it employs, greatly conduce.

It may be observed here, how pure and manly is the delineation of the Christian's love to his Redeemer and to his fellow-creatures, as detailed in the Scriptures. There is nothing of effeminacy, nothing that can be misinterpreted ; all is elevated and holy. In like manner, the accounts, the necessary accounts, of vice and crime, are most pure ; and calculated, like the inquiries of a physician, to promote the recovery of man. A few expressions have acquired an import, from the mere lapse of time since our English translation was made, not originally designed, and are instantly corrected by every reader.

exhibit the minister, the missionary, the teacher of youth. Nor do I dwell on the examples which display the faults and excellencies of nations, of bodies politic, of legislators, of magistrates, of churches and spiritual societies. It is sufficient for me to have shown the plan, in this respect, on which the Christian morals work—by strong and affecting examples.

I add only, that it proceeds by referring men to the **ALL-SEEING EYE OF GOD**, and the constant aid of the Holy Spirit. Christian morality is built on the faith of the invisible God who seeth in secret, and on the habitual persuasion of the agency of the Blessed Spirit, which is granted to all them that ask for it.

But this leads us to consider—

III. The inseparable CONNEXION OF THE MORALS OF CHRISTIANITY WITH EVERY OTHER PART OF REVELATION, AND ESPECIALLY WITH ITS PECULIAR DOCTRINES.

For, notwithstanding this extent and purity of the Christian theory of morals, and those subordinate means by which it works, the question yet remains—What is to set the machine actually in motion? What are to constitute the prevailing motives of duty? Every rule is a constraint, and every constraint is unpleasant. We must, therefore, have motives—powerful, because we have to conquer powerful passions—universal, because morals are designed for all men—permanent, because virtue is necessary for all times and all places.¹⁴

Here, then, the peculiar truths of the gospel, as well as those other parts of Revelation with which the precepts are inseparably connected, appear in all their influence. It is on the deep and ample basis of the Christian doctrine that the whole superstructure of Christian morals is grounded.

¹⁴ Frayssinous.

THE FACTS on which these doctrines rest, PREPARE FOR THE OPERATION OF MOTIVES most powerful, universal, and permanent.

The facts of the fall and corruption of man ; of the mercy of God in the gift of his own Son ; of the birth, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ ; of the descent and operations of the Holy Ghost ; of the promulgation of the Christian religion and its offers to mankind —these great facts fill the mind of the penitent with such a sense of the awful justice of God, of the inconceivable evil of sin, of the unspeakable love and mercy of the Almighty to a guilty world, as prepare for the formation of the Christian character ; as make sin the object of abhorrence, and holiness of choice and pursuit. The facts of Christianity, brought home to man's heart, and having their influence actually upon his conscience, that is, being truly believed, render morals practicable, natural, delightful. The machine is set at work. Exactly as the immoralities of the heathens were connected with their vile superstitions, were a part of them, were permitted by the laws of every heathen people, and incorporated with the usages of their temples and their religion ; so the pure and lovely morality of the gospel is connected with the FACTS of Christianity, forms a part of the religion, and is incorporated with all its worship and observances.

Further, the doctrines of Revelation are EXPRESSLY DESIGNED and admirably adapted to produce Christian obedience. He that receives Christianity aright, not only believes the facts on which it rests, but embraces the peculiar doctrines which explain those facts, in order that he may become the servant of God. He receives the doctrine of man's guilt and condemnation, and thereby learns to mourn over and forsake every sin ; he receives the glad tidings of joy in the salvation of Christ, and then loves and obeys this new master in every future act of his life ; he

receives the doctrine of justification by faith, and he proves that faith by its proper effects; he receives the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and he implores his promised grace, to renew his heart and to dispose him to love and practise the law of God; he receives the doctrine of the sacraments and other means of grace, and by them he obtains strength for persevering obedience. And why should I say a word of the immediate connexion of the doctrines of the holy character of God and of the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, with that obedience which cannot, even by supposition, be disjoined in the Christian's mind and conscience from them? Thus there is no truth conveyed in the doctrines, without a correspondent obligation enforced in the precepts. Holiness is the end in view of the whole Revelation, modified by the particular dispensation of the Son and Spirit of God. All meritorious confidence is, indeed, renounced; but "the dutiful necessity"¹⁵ of good works is greatly increased by every truth relating to our salvation.

For it is further to be noted, that the peculiar doctrines of Revelation go to form exactly THAT SORT OF CHARACTER, AND NO OTHER, WHICH THE MORALS REQUIRE; and that the precepts delineate and require that sort of character, and no other, which the doctrines go to form—that peculiar Christian spirit, I mean, which we have already shown to be the end in view in the performance of each particular duty. The Christian spirit is humble and lowly; founded on renunciation of self-righteousness and self-confidence; warmed with active benevolence and sympathy for the spiritual and temporal wants of man; accompanied with meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. And it is obvious that the peculiar doctrines of the gospel go to form this sort of character, and no other. For the facts on which they

¹⁵ Hooker.

rest inspire a general abhorrence of sin, and an admiration of the love of God ; and the proper consequence of receiving the doctrines is to perform correspondent duties : the result, therefore, of a cordial acquiescence in all the doctrines will be the formation of the peculiar sort of character which the Christian precepts delineate and require. That is, the doctrine of the guilt of man, producing humiliation and penitence ; and the doctrine of forgiveness and of sanctifying grace, producing holy love and obedience : the more these are wrought into the mind and habits, the more powerful will be the impress, the peculiar impress of the Christian character.

This we find to be the case in point of fact. The overwhelming LOVE OF CHRIST constrains, bears away, puts a holy necessity, as it were, upon the penitent, “ to live, not unto himself, but unto him that loved him and gave himself for him, and rose again.” “ He is not his own.”¹⁶ He is dedicated, made over, resigned by a voluntary surrender, to the service of his divine Lord. Thus, gratitude, admiration, love of God and man, detachment from the world, spirituality of mind, patience under injuries ; that is, the very character which the morals delineate and demand, is the natural result of the peculiar doctrines. These great discoveries, brought near and made effectual by the Holy Spirit, are an ever-living spring of vigorous and self-denying obedience. They perpetually supply principles of hatred of sin, of self-abasement, of thankfulness and joy ; which, like a fountain, feed the streams of actual effort and practical obedience.

Once more, the promises and privileges of the gospel are attached to CERTAIN DISPOSITIONS AND STATES OF MIND, which are essential parts of the morals of Revelation. The promises are chiefly made to certain characters—to those who are meek, to those

¹⁶ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

who pray, to those who seek God, to those who quit the society of the wicked, to those who love their brethren, to those who watch; to those who persevere in well-doing, &c.; that is, the promises are the most direct motives, not only to obedience, but to that particular sort of obedience which distinguishes the true Christian. What can be a more striking instance of this, than our Lord's attaching the most difficult of all duties—the forgiving of personal injuries—to the most exalted of all blessings, God's forgiveness of sins? so that in every age and every part of the world, wherever Christianity spreads, the duty most opposed to our natural corruption, and yet most characteristic of the peace and purity of the gospel, is indissolubly united with the most prominent doctrine of Revelation, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

It is another link in this chain of argument, that Christianity holds out to men **FURTHER ADVANCES IN HOLINESS**, as the recompence and reward of diligence, and not a further insight into mysteries and loftier heights of knowledge. Most false religions propose to reward their votaries by drawing aside the veil which conceals from the vulgar eye their hidden mysteries. The Hindoo superstitions, those of China, the false religion of Mahomet, act thus. They fall in with the principle of curiosity and the ambition of knowledge in man. Christianity prefers moral to intellectual excellency, and proposes to her followers, as the recompence of their present attainments, further advances in holiness, in the love of God, in the obedience of Christ, in meetness for heaven. Thus, all her promises bear upon morals, and tend to strengthen the obligations of them.

The doctrine of the **HEAVENLY STATE** and of the preparation for the employments of it, give the last seal to the truth of what we are now considering—the connexion of the morals of Christianity with its peculiar discoveries. For what is the doctrine of the

heavenly state, but that holiness is its very element, that all sin, all impurity, all error, all defect, will be excluded ; and that it is to be prepared for by that obedience, that holy faith and love, that meekness and spirituality, which, like the bud, are to be expanded in all their beauty and fragrance in that more genial soil ? Holiness is therefore the first stage, the commencement, the dawn of that character, of which heaven is the completion, the end, the effulgence. Unlike the wretched paradise of Mahometanism, which casts its impurities into the very heart of its precepts, by the voluptuous and degrading pleasures which it promises in its paradise ; Christianity impresses this master-truth upon man, that what we are in this world, we shall be in another ; that a future state will develop, not change, the character acquired on earth ; that life is the seed-time, of which the harvest will be reaped throughout eternity.

And this being the intimate relation of the Christian precepts with its great doctrines, why should I detain you by entering into the manner in which these precepts are involved IN ALL THE OTHER PARTS OF REVELATION ? Tell me what chapter in the Pentateuch is not filled with exhortations, examples, warnings. Point out to me the historical book which is not fraught with moral instruction. Show me in the devotional writings a single psalm which does not imply the most ardent pursuit of obedience. And with regard to the holy Prophets, what is the scope of all their remonstrances, so bold, so fervent ; what the end of all their persuasions and invitations ; what the design of their denunciations of idolatry and rebellion of heart in man ; what the purport of their prophetic outline of future events, whether relating to the times near at hand, or looking forward to the coming of Messiah and the long series of the divine providence towards the church—what, what is

all the object in view, but to reduce a disobedient nation to penitence and subjection to the command of God? I will not dwell on the Evangelical history, and the epistles of the holy apostles, because every child knows that holiness is the end and scope of them. What is there omitted, for example, by St. Paul, to enforce upon his converts, in all his writings, the obedience, the peculiar and characteristic obedience, of Christianity? How often does he descend from the very heights of his holy doctrines, to urge some duty, to impress upon man some part of the Christian temper and conduct!¹⁷ It is the glory of Christianity that her loftiest prophecies, her deepest mysteries, her most fervent devotions, not only inspire holiness, but aim at it, are essentially linked with it, and lose all their end if it be not produced. In short, as the precepts without the doctrines of Revelation, prescribe an unattainable rule, so the doctrines without the precepts fail in their great purpose, evaporate in mere emotions and sensibilities, and can neither sanctify nor save.

IV. But what, it may be asked, are THE SANCTIONS BY WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MORALS are ultimately enforced?

This is the important question. Whatever be the extent and purity of the rule, whatever the means by which it works, whatever its inseparable connexion with the doctrines of Revelation, all is inefficient, unless the authority which it brings to bear upon the conscience, and the rewards and punishments attached to it are weighty, solemn, efficacious.

A hand dissevered from the body, might as well be represented as sufficient for the purpose of labour, as unconnected and unauthoritative principles for the purposes of morality.

¹⁷ See as an example 1 Cor. xv. 55—58.

Heathen morals, in addition to innumerable other deficiencies, laboured under one which was fatal to the whole system; they had no sanction, no authority, no knowledge clear and definite of a future state or an eternal judgment. The faint light of reason, the voice of conscience, the fragments of tradition, were utterly insufficient to bind men. It was the state, the civil law, usage, convenience, which formed the quicksand on which their edifice was reared. Infidelity builds on no firmer foundation, when she pretends to raise her morals on the love of glory, honour, interest, utility, and the progress of civilization, with some feeble admissions of the belief of a future life.

Christianity stands forth in the midst of mankind, the only religion which asserts the will of God to be the clear and unbending rule of duty, and refers men to an eternal judgment as its ultimate sanction. Her morality conduces, indeed, to the welfare of man, it is agreeable to the reason of things, it responds to the voice of conscience; but none of these is its foundation—to argue morals out on these principles has been proved, by the experience of all ages, to be impossible.

THE WILL OF GOD is the brief, undeviating authority of moral obedience. And what majesty doth this throw around the precepts of the Bible! “Thus saith the Lord,” is the introduction, the reason, the obligation of every command. God appears as the legislator, the moral governor, the Lord of his accountable creatures. He speaks—“and all the earth keeps silence before him!”¹⁸

And why should I contrast the partial guesses of Paganism or Infidelity on a future state of rewards and punishment, with the full and decisive declarations of that gospel by which “life and immortality are brought to light?”¹⁹ Nature is ignorant. Nature

¹⁸ Hab. ii. 20.

¹⁹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

knows nothing distinctly of the rules of the last judgment. Nature can give no account of heaven and hell. Revelation alone pronounces with its awful voice the immortality of the soul. Revelation unveils the eternal world. Revelation makes all its doctrines and all its precepts bear upon the last dread assize, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed—when “the books shall be opened, when the sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and every man shall be judged out of the things written in the books, according to his works.”²⁰ These are the proper sanctions of morals. The purity of the code answers to the obligation of the enactments; the means or machinery it employs, corresponds with the importance of the consequences. The doctrines by which it is sustained are the suitable aids and encouragements for duties of such momentous import. An infinite God, an infinite rewarder, an infinite avenger—a judge of omniscient and omnipotent authority, a sentence of unmingled justice, a reward of unparalleled grace, a final and impartial settlement of the disordered state of the world by the Creator and Preserver of all—these are considerations which give a sublimity to the Christian morals, and attach an importance and weight to them which render them the only influential rule of human practice. To talk of morality without religion, is to talk of a legislation without a legislator. To talk of a religion without a distinct and solemn sanction derived from the proper evidences of a divine Revelation, is to talk the language of general, unmeaning declamation, which can neither animate nor control the heart. But to point out the Christian morals expounded in their purity and extent, furnished with ample means of becoming practicable, interwoven with the most powerful motives, and confirmed ultimately by the most solemn and precise sanctions, is to pro-

²⁰ Rev. xx. 11—13.

pose the true guide of life, the authoritative arbiter of human duty, the solemn and efficacious motive for the conduct of a reasonable and accountable being.

It adds incomparably to the force of these sanctions, that they are propounded continually by our Lord and his apostles, in the course of those very discoveries of grace, which at first sight might appear to interfere with them. In the midst of the discourses of Christ, and his exposition of the gospel to the Jews, there are interposed those direct assertions of the universal judgment and its invariable decisions, which prevent any abuse of the grace and privileges offered—whilst the apostles are perpetually reminding their converts, that “God is not mocked,” that we must “all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and that every man shall receive the things done in the body.”²¹

Nor is it a slight matter, that in the description given by our Saviour of the proceedings of that last day, happiness and misery are adjudged, not on the footing of faith or love, which are hidden principles known only to Almighty God, but on the footing of works, good or evil, manifested before men, and shown to flow from faith in the merits of the Redeemer in the one case, and contempt of him in the other.²²

On the whole, then, I must confess, when I review this great subject, that the morals taught in the gospel seem to me to place Revelation as far above the reach of merely human invention, and to carry along with them as clear an impress of a divine hand, as the general adaptation of Christianity to the state of man, or the grand and sublime plan of human salvation developed in its doctrines.²³ In fact, the argument from the Christian morals, is, if possible, stronger than that from the preceding topics, because, as I have said, it is more intelligible to every human being.

²¹ Gal. vi. 7; 2 Cor. v. 10.

²² Matt. xxv.

²³ Lect. XIV. and XV.

I. The morality of the gospel makes it IMPOSSIBLE, IN THE NATURE OF THINGS, THAT CHRISTIANITY SHOULD BE AN IMPOSTURE. This is my first remark, in concluding this lecture. I do not merely affirm, that the Christian morals strengthen the impression of truth derived from the external evidences, (which is all my argument demands,) but I assert that no wicked men could have invented, or could have wished to propose, or could have succeeded in establishing, such a religion, with such a code of precepts so inseparably united with it and springing from it. From the creation of the world to the present hour, the schemes of impostors have partaken, and from the very constitution of the human mind must partake, of the pride, the ambition, the restlessness, the cunning, the sensuality, the personal interests, the contempt of authority, from which they spring. All the superstitions of Paganism, as well as the imposture of the false prophet, explain themselves on this ground. We see, in the laxity and turpitude of their moral systems, a sufficient agreement with their pretended revelations.

I ask, then, with regard to Christianity, what could be the object—the *CUI BONO*—of an imposture, accompanied with a code of precepts so consistent, pure, elevated, complete, and in harmony with every part of the religion? The case speaks for itself. Such precepts could only have come down from the Father of lights, and have formed part of a Revelation sustained, as Christianity was, by every other species of external and internal testimony.

In fact, the fishermen of Galilee, even if they had been ever so pure in heart, (which the supposition of imposture makes impossible,) could never have composed a system of duty so new, so peculiar, so holy, so perfect. See how slowly and laboriously the science of morals, as a philosophical effort, is wrought out, even at the present day, by professed Christians,

and with all the aid of long experience, acute talents, and assiduous study—the defects, the gross defects of these systems are notorious.²⁴ And yet the morals of the gospel, without any pretensions to scientific arrangement, and composed by men of ordinary talents, amidst persecutions, and exile, and imprisonments, are found to contain the most pure and harmonious system of moral truth. That is, the only perfect code bursts suddenly upon the world complete at once ; and the improvement which two thousand years have produced, in those who judge of this subject, and bring the gospel to the trial concerning it, only serves to illustrate the wisdom of divine Revelation by the contrast with human weakness and folly.²⁵

But this consideration is incomparably strengthened, if we turn to the WRETCHED SYSTEMS WHICH MODERN INFIDELS PROPOSE FOR THE DIRECTION OF MANKIND. I should rather say their want of system—nay, their want of any honest intention to promote morality. They talk sometimes of moral duty, they commend the gospel precepts, they vaunt the light of nature and the sufficiency of human reason ; but when you watch them in detail, you discover that there is neither foundation nor superstructure ; neither principles nor duties ; neither rules nor exhortations in their code of morality. As to authority and sanction, the ablest of them²⁶ doubt of the immortality of the soul, doubt of a last judgment, doubt of eternal happiness and misery. Were their systems, therefore, ever so perfect, they would have far less force to bind the conscience than the very morals of heathenism. But what, after all, are their systems ? They agree in excluding the divine Being from their theories ; but upon no other point. One resolves all

²⁴ See Reid, Stewart, Brown, &c

²⁵ Dr. Hey's Lect. in Bp. J. Bird Sumner.

²⁶ Hume, Gibbon, &c.

morality into self-love—another into the law of the state—another into motives of interest—another into what is useful in society—whilst another has recourse to feeling, and asserts that whatever he feels to be right, is right.” On these quicksands what durable edifice can arise? None. There is no bond of society so sacred which they do not burst asunder—there is no personal duty so universally admitted, which they do not impugn—female modesty itself cannot maintain its ground before their coarse depravity. I do not scruple to say that the tendency, and I believe in most cases the design, of our infidel writings, is to dig up the foundation of morals, to efface the distinctions of good and evil, and resign men to the wretched contest of base interests and civil restraints, without a God, without a providence, without a day of retribution, without a futurity.

From such darkness we turn to the soft and healing light of the Christian morality, as the traveller hails the dawn of day after a howling, tempestuous night.

I appeal to every heart before me. I ask every ingenuous youth whether he is not horror-struck with the frightful projects of unbelief; whether his whole moral nature is not shocked by their principles; and whether their rejection of Christianity is not an unavoidable consequence of their holding such opinions? Yes. You can no more reject Christianity, if you are candid and sincere in your inquiries after morality, than you can cast off your accountableness or your personal identity. Such pure morals, working by such means, sustained by such motives, and sanctioned by an eternal judgment, carry their own divine original with them, and need no detail of arguments.

III. HOLD FAST, then, BY THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. Remember the argument of this discourse

in the hour of temptation. Call it to mind when the series of external proofs may be less vividly present with you. Say to yourself—‘Even if I were to be unable to answer the objections of unbelievers on every other question, yet the morals of Christianity make it incomparably my SAFER COURSE to obey the gospel. There can, I know, be no comparison, properly speaking, between the safety of receiving and rejecting such a revelation, resting on such accumulated evidences. But even if an adversary should perplex me in the historical argument, if he should bewilder my mind, and persuade me that the proofs are not sufficiently clear and satisfactory, let me remember that it must ever be my safer course to persevere in my adherence to the gospel. For where a code of morals so pure, so benevolent, so spiritual, so entirely agreeing with the light of reason and the moral sense of man, so directly tending to my present peace of conscience as well as my future happiness ; when such a code is set before me, it is infinitely safer for me to obey it, than to take a contrary course ; because, in obeying it I lose nothing, I venture nothing, I incur no possible risk. I am following nature ; but nature corrected and illuminated—I am following the law of conscience ; but elevated and purified—I am acting on the eternal distinctions of right and wrong ; but cleared up and defined—I am following the dictates of utility and social peace and general happiness ; but resting on the authority and will of God. I lose nothing, therefore, here : nay, I gain in every point of the enumeration. But then, in addition to this, Christianity gives me motives for obedience, springs of inward affection and delight, the power of the Holy Spirit to aid me in the performance of duty, the mercy of God to pardon my failings, the death and passion of Jesus Christ to supply my want of desert and merit. That is, I have every aid and succour in the performance of this course of obe-

dience. The peculiar doctrines of the gospel relieve me, add consolation to me, soften the yoke of obedience, make the path of duty practicable and easy. I will, therefore, cleave to this holy doctrine, which has formed so many virtuous fathers, faithful wives, docile children, upright magistrates, modest scholars, generous nobles, resigned sufferers. I will cleave to this holy doctrine, which makes the rich benevolent, the exalted meek, the powerful considerate, the learned humble, the lowly contented. I will cleave to this holy doctrine, which works by implanting every virtuous principle in the heart, and which is sustained by all the motives of the stupendous Redemption of the Son and Spirit of God, and which refers every human action to an eternal judgment. No ; I will never renounce the Christian religion. It is this which binds my conscience, restrains my appetites, subdues my passions. It is this which has made me all I now am, little as my attainments are. If I did but love holiness more, and practise my duties more consistently, I should be more happy. I have peace within only when I do so. Let me employ all the aids of Revelation to strengthen me in this course, and I shall have more and more the testimony of my conscience, in addition to all the external and internal evidences, to assure me that a religion with such a morality cannot but be divine.'

LECTURE XVII.

THE PRE-EMINENT CHARACTER AND CONDUCT
OF OUR LORD.

MARK vii. 37.

And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well.

IN reviewing the constituent parts of Christianity, it is natural to ask if any light can be cast upon them from the character of the founder of the religion? Did he appear publicly before men? What was his deportment? How did he support the claims which he advanced?

These questions lead us to consider the conduct of our Lord as the Divine Author of the Christian faith.

We have already adverted more than once to this subject,¹ but we enter on it expressly now, as furnishing a powerful internal evidence of the truth of the Revelation which bears his name.

To consider it aright, we must first distinctly call to mind what manner of person our Lord professed to be—**what** were the offices and relations which he undertook to sustain.

¹ Lectures VI. VII. IX.

For Christ, be it remembered, was not merely the founder of a religion ; but he appeared publicly as such amongst the people to whom the Scripture prophecies had for four thousand years promised his advent, and at the exact time designated by those prophecies.² He claimed, not only to be a messenger sent from God, but to be the MESSIAH, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind.

We may well suppose, then, that this peculiar character involved qualities new, various, and exalted. This is, in truth, the case ; and a just estimate of the argument derived from our Lord's conduct, will depend on a consideration of the number and difficulty of the relations he bore, and of the manner in which he sustained them.

What, then, were the chief claims which he advanced ?

Professing himself to be the Messiah, he assumed the titles of the Saviour, the Redeemer, the great Prophet of the church, the King of Israel, the appointed Judge of quick and dead. He declared himself also, for the same reason, to be the Lord of David, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, Jehovah our Righteousness. He performed in these characters, moreover, miraculous works, in support of his pretensions—he healed the sick, raised the dead, expelled demons, suspended the laws of nature, and exercised in his own person a creative power. Again, he assumed, as the consequence of all this, to be the teacher of truth, the light of the world, the expounder and vindicator of the moral law, the authoritative legislator of mankind.

Notwithstanding these exalted pretensions, his office as the Messiah involved the most apparently contradictory characteristics. It required him to be the Son of man, the servant and messenger of his heavenly

² Lecture IX.

Father, subject to human infirmities and sorrows, obedient to all the ceremonial requirements and moral injunctions of the Mosaic law—"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."³ All this, therefore, our Lord professed himself to be.

Still he scrupled not to hold forth to his followers a heavenly reward, the presence and enjoyment of God, a recompence for their sufferings in his cause, which should in this life be a hundred fold beyond their sacrifices, and should in another, consist of perfect holiness and inconceivable bliss.

Claims so numerous and so various, necessarily implied correspondent relations as arising out of them. He had to conduct himself as the Son of God and Messiah, in all the elevated and all the lowly offices involved in those titles. He had, at the same time, to sustain all the relations that sprung from the peculiar characters belonging to him as Redeemer, teacher, and rewarder of his disciples.

But this is not all ; besides these offices, our Lord assumed another and distinct function, demanding an apparently different conduct and deportment. He proposed himself as the pattern and example of every human excellence to his followers. He assumed to embody the moral precepts of his religion in his own life, and to be himself all that he required of his followers. He reduced all his rules to the one direction of following his steps.

Finally, he claimed, on the footing of all these qualities and testimonies, to be the FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION, the Author and Finisher of the faith of the Gospel ; to introduce the last and most perfect and universal form of revealed truth ; fulfilling all the preparatory economy, and carrying out every branch of religion to its utmost extent, and with the greatest advantage.

³ Isaiah liii. 3.

Such an union of pretensions was never heard of before or since, amongst men. Our Lord is beyond comparison the most extraordinary personage that ever advanced his claims on earth. In the whole business of man's redemption, wonderful in all its parts—in its beginning, its progress, its completion—the most wonderful part is the diversified names and offices of our Lord, as compared with his actual conduct in fulfilling them.

By every part of these pretensions he laid himself open to the scrutiny of mankind. By every one of them, he exposed a surface for investigation wide as the various and distinct duties springing from them. And by the combination of the whole, he has furnished materials for the internal confirmation of his religion, which are as new as they are inexhaustible, which the study of ages only incompletely develops, and which remain to the present hour in all their freshness and beauty, for the admiration of every humble and obedient inquirer.

Let us, then, consider the life and conduct of our Lord, as compared with his pretensions.

In his more peculiar character as **MEDIATOR**. In his private character and **PERSONAL EXCELLENCIES**. In his public and exalted character as **THE FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION**.

In the first, he is the promised **MESSIAH** of the church; in the second, he is the model and **EXAMPLE** of his disciples; in the third, he is the divine **AUTHOR** of an universal religion. In all, his deportment will be found to furnish a subsidiary but irresistible argument in favour of Christianity.

Our object, of course, in considering these points, will not be to bring out the external evidences as involved in them, but the internal proofs arising from such divine excellencies in Christ's character as they were the occasion of displaying.

But here a difficulty presents itself; not arising from any intricacy in the subject to be discussed, but from the incompetency of man to do justice to it: for who can set forth the character of Christ? It demands much of the sanctity of Jesus to comprehend his unspeakable dignity and holiness. What mind can fully embrace such a theme? And where are the hearers who are sufficiently acquainted with the gospel history? Who have studied, as they should, the records of the life of the Son of God? Our argument can only be estimated in proportion as the copious references, on which it rests, meet with the well-informed mind.

Grant me, then, at least, your attention; and may God vouchsafe to us grace to study, with a docile and impartial temper, the divine character of his well-beloved Son!

We are first to point out the conduct of our Lord in
HIS MORE PECULIAR CHARACTER AS MEDIATOR.

This will include his deportment as the Son of God and Saviour of the world; as a divine teacher; as appearing in a state of humiliation; and promising a heavenly recompence to his disciples.

1. Observe, then, the manner in which our Lord sustained his high claims of being THE SON OF GOD AND THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.

Here we may first remark, that they are not put forth ostentatiously, but only as occasions called for them. There are, indeed, explicit declarations of his exalted origin. He "called God his Father," in the sense of "making himself equal with God."⁴ He asserted, "Before Abraham was, I am."⁵ But these and many similar claims sprang from the circumstances in which he was placed, and were not made for the mere purpose of asserting his own dignity. It

⁴ John v. 17, 18.

⁵ John viii. 58.

is incidentally, rather than formally, that you see divinity breaking forth. You hear him command angels and devils ; you see him work miracles in his own name ; you observe how he forgives sins, assumes to be greater than Solomon, replies to the thoughts of his hearers, and calls on men to believe in and honour him, even as they believed and honoured the Father.

Yet he enters into no details on these points, no explanations of the mode of his union with the Father. He leaves these to be inferred. He speaks of them with the ease and naturalness with which one, born a prince, would speak of his father's court and attendants—without surprise, without introduction, without effort, without detailed description. The invisible world, mansions in paradise, legions of angels, his own advent in glory to judge the world, are evidently matters with which he is familiar. The astonishing scene at his baptism, the splendours of the transfiguration, the various offices performed towards him by angels, the repeated testimonies from his Father by a voice from heaven, pass as matters of course, and create no extraordinary emotion, in the mind of the Son of God.

In the mean time, every thing has an evident reference to his undertaking, as the promised Messiah and Saviour of mankind. With what dignity and wisdom is all made to bear on that one object. With what majesty, and yet unaffected simplicity and compassion, did he open the book in the synagogue of Nazareth, and, having read the prophetic description of his office, declare "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."⁶ With what a mixture of authority and tenderness did he, on another occasion, claim that "All things were delivered to him of his Father ; and that no man knew who the Son was, save the

⁶ Luke iv. 21.

Father, nor who the Father was, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son should reveal him ;” and then soften the claim and adapt it to the purposes of his mission, by inviting the “ weary and heavy laden to come unto him for rest !”⁷ With what dignity did he call on those who applied to him, to entertain the highest thoughts of his power, to repose their faith in his word, and to expect relief in proportion to their honourable conceptions of his office and person.

And how remarkably does he mingle his own name with his Father’s, his own works with his Father’s, his own glory with his Father’s, for the purpose of elevating and fortifying the faith of his disciples. “ He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. Whatsoever ye ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”⁸

I will not stop to ask whether these points sufficiently prove that our Lord sustained, in a pre-eminent manner, his high claims of being the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. You see the refulgence of his Divinity ; you are compelled to recognize “ his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth !”⁹

2. But consider our Lord’s conduct as A TEACHER AND REVEALER OF THE WILL OF GOD, which formed the next part of his peculiar character as Mediator. How admirable was both the manner and the matter of his instructions !

Never was a MANNER of instruction so DIGNIFIED AND FORCIBLE, and at the same time so MILD AND ATTRACTIVE.

⁷ Matt. xi. 26—28.

⁸ John xiv. 9—13 ; xi. 4 ; xvii. 5.

⁹ John i. 14.

How DIGNIFIED AND FORCIBLE are his discourses ! You see the messenger from heaven, the Messiah, the maker and creator of all things. He speaks with the native majesty of the Son of God. Sentences full of weight, brief aphorisms, authoritative comments on the errors of the Jews, clear and conclusive decisions on the import of the law, messages sent, and demands issued with a solemnity which penetrates the hearers, short lessons left on the minds of the crowds by whom he was surrounded ;—these were his methods of teaching ; all most suitable to the character which Christ bore, but utterly inconsistent with every other. Even his most familiar parables breathe an innate divinity, proceed on the supposition of his union with the Father, and his glorious advent to judge the world. The simplest images and illustrations are big with hidden majesty. He is the Light of the world, the living Vine, the Bread of God, the hidden Treasure, the Pearl of unknown price, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Every idea inspires awe and reverence in the mind of the astonished hearer.

And yet, with all this dignity, how MILD AND ATTRACTIVE is his manner of teaching ! Lo, he takes up young children in his arms. See, he passes softly and meekly from place to place, not “breaking the bruised reed, nor lifting up his voice in the streets.”¹⁰ Hear him condescending to the comprehensions of the populace in his most striking parables, where the implied authority and majesty are still surrounded with the utmost simplicity and attractiveness. The most obvious images clothe ideas the most important and deep. What exquisite touches are there in the parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the ten virgins, the marriage feast ! How intelligible and familiar are the illustrations drawn from the incidents

¹⁰ Matt. xii. 20.

of each place and time ! When he gives sight to the blind, he speaks of himself as the light of the world ; when little children are brought unto him, he makes them an example of humility ; when he views the lilies of the field, he discourses of providence ; when the produce of the earth appears before him, he bids his disciples to judge of men by their fruits ; when he is seated at a feast, he speaks of the gospel entertainment ; when he washes the disciples' feet, he discourses of purity of heart. Never was there a course of religious doctrines so familiar, so lovely in the manner of their being conveyed, as those of our Lord.

And why should I speak of the MATTER of them ? What heart has not been affected with the GRANDEUR and yet FACILITY, the EARNESTNESS and yet WISDOM, apparent in the matter of our Saviour's doctrine ?

It was, indeed, in all the substance of it, full of GRANDEUR of the most majestic, novel, and weighty communications to man. Our divine Teacher fills and overwhelms the mind with the most sublime ideas, and pours out doctrines, which, to the ignorant and prejudiced Jews, were most surprising and strange. He unfolds the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ; he displays the riches of the gospel ; he assumes the position of a legislator in expounding the law ; he repels the pride and traditions of the scribes and pharisees with indignation ; he converses on the subject of his sufferings with prophets, lawgivers, and angels ; he opens the hidden meaning of the ancient predictions ; he detects all the secrets of the human heart. All is no peculiar, so elevated, so divine, as to leave an impression of grandeur and infinite excellency on the mind.

And yet no doctrine was ever so INTELLIGIBLE AND SIMPLE as to its practical bearings and its results. It was precisely level to man's comprehensions ;

it made religion clear, interesting, persuasive. The instructions are adapted to the habits of thinking of the poor, are opened and expanded for their capacities, separated from points of difficulty and abstraction, and presented only in the aspect which regarded their duty and hopes. The matter is such as not to gratify, but inform ; not to smite with surprise, but love ; not to impose by mere grandeur, but convey practical knowledge with condescension and grace.

Nor is the union of urgency and zeal, with forbearance and wisdom, less obvious in our Lord's instructions : for how ASSIDUOUS AND EARNEST was he in his doctrine ! How solemn, how penetrating, how importunate ! He was always inculcating his divine lessons. He went about from place to place preaching incessantly the gospel of the kingdom. He was always at work, always the teacher. He instructed men before, and during, and after his miracles. He undertook journeys, and neglected ordinary accommodations, and even food, in order to teach particular sinners. It was " his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him, and finish his work."¹¹ He never yielded in his efforts whilst any hope remained, but inculcated again and again the same lessons under various forms—sometimes accumulating three or four parables to enforce a single point. " The zeal of his Father's house consumed him,"¹² as it were : and he was straitened till he had fully accomplished his ministry.

And yet with what FORBEARANCE AND WISDOM was all the matter of his instructions tempered ! How gradually did he introduce the more humiliating parts of his doctrine ! He first establishes his mission by his divine works, and then follows them by the simpler truths of the gospel. He begins with the call to repentance. He goes on enlarging the bound-

¹¹ John iv. 14.

¹² John xi. 17.

ary of his lessons with the widening knowledge of the people. He reserves the doctrine of his sufferings till the one half of his ministry is expired.¹³ He leaves the details and consequences of his death for the dispensation of the Spirit. He knows how to vary his matter, sometimes communicating truth obliquely, sometimes directly ; at one time in plain terms, at other times covertly, as wisdom pointed out and occasions suggested. He did not “ put new wine into old bottles,” or insert “ a new cloth into an old garment,”¹⁴ by teaching doctrines for which his disciples were not prepared : he hastened nothing ; forestalled nothing ; but taught precisely those lessons which a perfect wisdom dictated.

Never was there such a teacher as Jesus Christ. I speak not now of the miraculous works which attended his doctrine ; that is not our topic ; but of those excellencies in sustaining his claims of a divine instructor, which win the heart—which give the impression, not only of the truth of the religion which he taught, but of that union of grandeur and condescension, of zeal and wisdom, of dignity and forbearance, of gentleness and authority, of sublimity and plainness, which was most exactly agreeable to the preceding parts of his character as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, and which most clearly confirmed all the direct proofs of his mission.

3. But it may be asked, How did our Lord support the most difficult of all parts, THE STATE OF HUMILIATION to which he likewise professed himself to be called ? Nothing is so rare as the bearing with dignity a continued state of sorrow, woe, degradation. Yet in nothing was our Lord’s character more admirable, than in the whole manner in which he sustained his lowly condition upon earth. The ineffable dignity

¹³ Matt. xvi.

¹⁴ Matt. ix. 17.

and meekness of all he did, were rendered more conspicuous by the very meanness of his circumstances, and even by those sufferings of his life and death, which would have tarnished or obscured the virtues of any one else. Mark the humble Saviour as he passes through his state of voluntary abasement. Observe him, before his public ministry, subject to his reputed parents. See him, at his entrance on it, led into the wilderness, to be tempted forty days of the devil. Follow him afterwards into his retirements, his solitude, his mountain-oratories. He shuns popularity and display. He dwells at the despised city of Nazareth, or the little fishing town of Capernaum. He refuses to be called rabbi. He commands those whom he had healed to conceal his mighty works. He rejects all appearances of flattery, not willing even to be called good, when the reason of the appellation was misconceived. Thus willingly and determinately does he descend into the valley of humiliation, and proceed in it throughout his ministry. We wonder no longer that the marks of his divine glory were no brighter nor more frequent; all is with him designed abasement and concealment. View the man of sorrows enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself! See him the object of contempt and scorn! Hear him calumniated as having a devil and being mad! Even his brethren reject him. Observe, he has not where to lay his head! Mark the people eager to cast him down from the precipice.—And notice how he sustains all this treatment, how he walks in the lowly tract of depression, without murmuring, without despondency, without degrading his divine person, his heavenly design, his heavenly Father, his heavenly home! From this very darkness, burst forth from time to time the softest rays of light and glory.

But who can meditate on the last scene of our Lord's sufferings, without perceiving the calm dignity

with which he sustains them! He “lays aside his garment, he girds himself with a towel, he washes his disciples’ feet,”¹⁵ at the moment when any other sufferer would have been wrapt in thought, and been working himself up to an effort of silent fortitude.¹⁶ He proceeds in the mighty woe. The garden of Gethsemane witnesses his agony, and the resignation which sustained it—the traitor approaches—the bar of Pilate follows—Calvary closes the tragic scene.—And what meekness appears throughout, what composure, what faith, what self-possession, what pity for his disciples! Humiliation was never seen so deep, nor supported with such magnanimity. Search all the records of history, and nothing can be found so touching, nothing so elevated, as the manner in which our Saviour conducted himself during his state of abasement, and vindicated this part of the claims which he made,

4. But it is important to consider the conduct of our Lord as to the HEAVENLY REWARD THAT HE PROMISED TO HIS DISCIPLES. We cannot better judge of the bearing of any one’s real character who professes to found a religion, than by considering the end which he sets before his followers; the reward he holds forth at the close of his undertaking. How then does the divine Jesus support his pretensions to the distribution of final recompences? What is the sort of happiness which he proposes? What description does he present of it? How does it stand related to himself?

Now the very nature of the reward which our divine Lord proposes, is a confirmation of all his claims. For the happiness which he promises, is to flow exclusively from holiness, purity, an immediate access to God, the full attainment of that obedience which was

¹⁵ John xiii. 2, &c.

¹⁶ Bowdler.

sincerely though imperfectly practised on earth ; the completion of the *gracious* sanctification of the Holy Spirit, in all its principles, exercises, and effects ; unimpeded by a body of sin and death, and carried out into all its blessed consequences and fruits—a reward this, the whole character of which is an attestation of his divine mission.

And yet, in the description, or rather hints which our Lord gives of this heavenly state, he confines himself to a few brief points of information. He gives no detail, he gratifies no curiosity, he tells us nothing of the invisible world, and the system of things there carried on. He just opens enough to animate our hope and stimulate our diligence ; and then drops the curtain, and leaves us to enter heaven in order to understand it.

But here remark—and it is a point of singular importance, and one entirely unheard of in the case of any other author of a religion—this pure and happy state in the heavenly world is represented as the being with himself, the being like Christ, the beholding of Christ's glory. That is, **OUR DIVINE MASTER HIMSELF CONSTITUTES HEAVEN**—his presence confers unutterable joy : to be with him and like him, is both holiness and happiness. There is an inexpressible majesty in this conception, which is yet introduced and repeated with the utmost naturalness and ease.—Heaven is the entering into the felicity, and partaking of the blessedness, of Jesus Christ.

Need I say, then, that the peculiar character and deportment of our Lord as Mediator, which is the first division of our argument, abounds with the most copious and endearing testimonies to the truth of all his pretensions ?

We proceed to consider,

II. The manner in which he supported his claims

AS THE EXAMPLE OF HUMAN VIRTUE TO HIS DISCIPLES—this regards our Lord's private, as the former referred to his peculiar and official, character.

It might be doubted, indeed, how all these high and exalted particulars could stand with this additional claim which Christ advanced, of being the pattern and humble example of his followers. Surely here, we might think, our Saviour must fail to support an assumption apparently so contradictory. And yet it is here that his character shines forth most resplendent. The personal virtues of our Lord, the private tenor of his life, his spotless purity, benignity and grace, as fully make out his title to be the standard of moral excellency, as the rest of his character vindicates his other pretensions. There are, indeed, as the preceding topics demonstrate, parts of his conduct in which he is not imitable by us—he appears often as the only begotten of the Father, as the Saviour of the world, as one on whom the anointing Spirit immeasurably rested, to qualify him for a wholly peculiar ministry. But these actions are readily distinguished ; and the far larger portion of our Saviour's conduct remains as the attractive object of our imitation and love.

SOME SEPARATE VIRTUES in our blessed Master shall first be noticed ; and then a few remarks offered on the UNION of them in his holy life.

1. Observe, first, HIS PIETY AND DEVOTION TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER. Though he had no sin to confess, and no corrupt nature to subdue ; yet how habitually fervent was he in his devotions, acknowledgments, and humiliation before his heavenly Father. He refers every thing to him. He begins no great act without solemn prayer ; on more than one occasion spending the whole night in supplication. When he multiplied the five loaves and the two fishes for the supply of the five thousand, he looked up to heaven and blessed them. When he approached the grave of

Lazarus, he first prayed solemnly to his Father. He taught his disciples a prayer, which for brevity, as Paley observes, fulness of meaning, suitableness, and simplicity, stands unrivalled. He professed not to do his own will, but the will of his Father ; to accomplish which was his meat and drink. Throughout his life, he directed every act to his Father's glory. Twice he purged the temple with severe authority, in order to vindicate his Father's honour. His trust in Him was uniform, strong, apparent, on every occasion. There was, so far as we can judge, a continued communion going on between his heavenly Father and the mind of our blessed Lord. Zeal for his glory so filled him, that he was straitened till he had accomplished his holy undertaking. Just before his agony, he presents us with a specimen of his intercession before the throne of God. In his last sufferings, holy trust, resignation, prayer, love to his heavenly Father, sustained him. Christ's character was a devout, religious, elevated character, supported by inward principles of faith and love to God, and confidence in him. Christ's was, in the proper sense of the term, a most pious life. This was a main ingredient. This strikes the mind at every turn. And yet there was nothing of the secluded and austere mixed with the devout in him. It was precisely a piety so expressed, and so mingled with all his conduct, as to furnish a perfect example to his followers.

Next to his piety towards God, was HIS BENEVOLENCE AND COMPASSION TOWARDS MAN. Nothing was more apparent in our Lord, than genuine goodwill, kindness, tenderness of heart. His life was not one of strict justice merely, but of overflowing benignity.¹⁷ He went about to bless and console this sorrowing world. His miracles were almost all acts of kindness and beneficence—healing all manner of disease, casting out devils, restoring sight to the blind,

¹⁷ Abp. Newcombe.

and even raising again the dead. Instead of displaying the portentous powers by which the mission of Moses was made to triumph over the rebellious Pharaoh; in the benevolent Jesus all was characteristic of the peace and goodwill which he came to proclaim.¹⁸ He was our brother, one like unto ourselves, sin only excepted. When he saw an amiable young man, then he loved him. When he beheld the multitude fainting, he had compassion on them, because they were scattered and were as sheep that had no shepherd. As he approached the city of Nain, "Behold a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and Jesus, when he saw her, had compassion on her, and said unto her,"¹⁹ Weep not. And he came and touched the bier, (and they that bore him stood still,) and he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak, and he delivered him to his mother."²⁰ Was ever such genuine, deeply-seated benevolence before seen! The whole narrative teems with compassion. Thus, also, when he was approaching the ungrateful city of Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were just about to imbue their hands in his blood, how did he weep over it, as winding round the heights of the Mount of Olives, it burst upon his view:²¹ his own sufferings forgotten, the shouts of the applauding multitude unheard, he is absorbed in the miseries about to fall on the people for their sins! Again, who can fully conceive of the compassion which led him, when expiring in death, to provide a refuge for his mother, when a sword was going through her very heart, as she beheld her son in the agonies of the crucifixion.

¹⁸ Doddridge observes, that our Lord wrought more beneficent miracles in one afternoon, than any of the ancient prophets in the course of a whole life. See Matt. ix. 33.

¹⁹ At once, before he had begun the intended restoration.

²⁰ Luke vii.

²¹ Mr. Jowett mentions this touching circumstance in his Researches.

Time forbids me to point out how this benevolence of Christ flowed forth in "the forgiveness of injuries"—nor is it needful. Not a single word of resentment, nor any expression of personal displeasure, ever came out of his mouth. He was daily and hourly returning good for evil, till, on the cross, he prayed for the very wretches who were driving the nails into his hands and feet—"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."²²

Nor is it necessary to dwell on THAT MEEKNESS AND LOWLINESS OF SPIRIT which so remarkably appeared in our Lord, but which we have just noticed in describing his conduct in his state of humiliation. In fact, so meek was Jesus, and so confessedly was this the whole impress of his character, that he could call on his disciples to imitate him in this respect, without rendering his sincerity for a moment questionable. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."²³ The soft and gentle spirit of Christ is ever apparent. "As a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth."²⁴ Instead of the ambition, the susceptibility of affronts, the self-confidence, the personal importance, which appeared in other moral teachers, our Lord was uniformly gentle and lowly. It is impossible even for the unbeliever to deny, and indeed he does not venture to deny, the meekness and lowliness of Christ's character.

Then consider HIS SUPERIORITY TO THE WORLD—to the passions, objects, opinions, pleasures, indulgences, love of ease; regard to fame, to riches, to display, to influence, to praise—which the Scripture includes under that comprehensive term, and which have ever ensnared, under one form or other, all merely human teachers. In our Saviour we see nothing of a worldly spirit:—there was no courting of the great, no

²² Luke xxiii. 34.

²³ Matt. xi. 29.—Bowdler.

²⁴ Isaiah liii. 7.

fawning over the persons of the noble, no haunting the palaces of kings, no deference to the authority of powerful and wicked men, no debates about human politics and temporal interests, no desire after worldly distinction or dominion, no leaning to an outward splendour and an external Messiahship, such as the Jews designed and feigned. On the contrary, never was there so unworldly a character, never such disinterestedness, never such superiority to all the glare and bustle and attraction of the world and worldly glory. He estimated things as they really were, and acted simply and invariably upon that estimate. He was not of the world; he was of another spirit, engaged in other pursuits, touched by other interests, bent on higher and nobler ends. And in no respect is his example more perfect in itself, and more necessary to us, than in his "overcoming of the world."

Then mark the STRICT TEMPERANCE AND COMMAND OF THE INFERIOR APPETITES which our Lord exercised—a rare and difficult attainment! But what self-denial, what abstinence from indulgence, what freedom from every thing like the stain of excess, appeared in Christ! His temperance how pure, how elevated, how vigilant, how uniform, how natural! He wrought no miracle for the supply of his own wants—you hear of none of these wants. He pities the multitude, indeed, and feeds them miraculously: but for himself, he has not where to lay his head. Whilst he sits instructing the Samaritan woman, he accounts that he has "meat to eat which his disciples knew not of;" whilst, as to them, they are compelled to go into the city to purchase food.²⁵

Join to these virtues, THE FORTITUDE AND CONSTANCY which appeared in our Redeemer—that quality of mind which is compounded of courage, patience, and perseverance; which knows not how to yield in a

²⁵ John xvi. 33.

²⁶ John iv. 8.

great undertaking; which is daunted by no opposition, and fails under no discouragement; which endures contradiction, violence, injustice, oppression. With what fortitude does our Lord bear the incessant hostility and perverseness of the Jews! With what constancy and boldness does he arraign the vices and hypocrisy and cruelties of the scribes and pharisees! When did he betray any symptoms of cowardice or the fear of man? When did he fly in dejection or irresolution? No: "he fainted not, neither was discouraged, till he had set judgment in the earth."²⁷

THE PRUDENCE AND DISCRETION which ever adorned our divine Master must not be overlooked. These made a remarkable, though not a disproportionate, part of his character. He never invited attack by imprudence, nor provoked hostility by intemperate rashness. When no good could be effected in one spot, he withdrew to another. The questions dictated by curiosity or craft, he repelled by wisdom; proposing other questions, or inculcating a general doctrine, or softening reproof, by the veil of a parable. The forethought, the consideration of circumstances, the adaptation of means to the desired end, the disposition of the several parts of his doctrine to their proper purposes and to the class of his auditory, his determination under a choice of difficulties, his address in defending his disciples when accused, his apologies before the bigoted Jews, marked our Lord's wisdom. The human heart lay open before him: difficult questions and sudden turns only served to display his consummate prudence. Yes, "he did all things well;"²⁸ his prudence was as conspicuous in the manner, as his benevolence in the execution, of his designs.

2. But I must not detain you longer on the separate

²⁷ Isaiah xlii. 4.

²⁸ Mark vii. 37.

graces of our Saviour's personal character, much as they might be extended. I must proceed to offer a few remarks on the UNION of them in his most holy life; for he combined all the various branches of moral excellency, and exhibited in equal perfection the graces and virtues the most opposite to each other, without the proximate failings, or any decay in vigour and consistency. And in this respect our Lord surpassed all human examples of virtue. It is a common remark, that a principle of opposition, and as it were compensation, runs through the works of the Almighty. The stronger virtues are seldom found without an alliance of austerity, nor the softer without weakness and feebleness.²⁹ Still more uncommon is it to find the stronger and softer qualities in due proportion. Whilst no example is to be found, except in the blessed Jesus, of all these being, not only united, but carried to the utmost height and preserved in one uniform tenor. Yet such was the case in our Lord.

His virtues were UNALLOYED WITH THE KINDRED FAILINGS. His temperance was unaccompanied with severity, his fortitude was without rashness, his constancy without obstinacy, his self-denial without moroseness, his devotion and piety without indifference to the affairs of life. And so on the other hand, his benevolence never sunk into weakness, his humility into fear of man, his love of retirement into inactivity, his tenderness into compliance with sin.

Not only so; THE OPPOSITE, AND APPARENTLY CONTRADICTORY, GRACES WERE FOUND IN HIM IN EQUAL PROPORTION. His elevation of mind, and sublimity in the conception of divine things, were connected with the utmost facility and simplicity. His superiority to the world, and spirituality of affection, were equalled by his affability and freedom in conversing with mankind. His temperance and fortitude

were adorned with the opposite graces of meekness and forbearance; his love and benignity with courage and decision of character; his compassion for sinners with the most pointed rebukes of the incorrigible and hypocritical. His condescension in consorting with publicans and sinners, was united with the utmost purity and dignity; his incessant diligence with suavity; his zeal in the service of God, and in prosecuting his mission, with prudence and discretion. The active were thus allied with the contemplative virtues, the strong with the tender, the heroical with the retired. Each virtue was free from the proximate defect, and accompanied with the opposite excellency.

Further than this, all was CARRIED TO THE UTMOST HEIGHT, AND CONTINUED IN ONE EVEN TENOR. Christ had uniformity and consistency of virtue, in the strictest sense; he had strength of character. Power of every kind is less exhibited by violent efforts of short duration, than by a steady, unyielding agency and progression.³⁰ It was not at one time, but at every time; not in one situation, but in every kind of situation; not at the beginning of his ministry merely, but throughout it; not in one or two respects, but in all, that the virtues of Christ were manifested. And this at the greatest height of which the human nature is susceptible, and which the law of God requires. There is no flaw, no stain in our Lord's character; not a single defect, much less any crime. It was a perfect model for our imitation. Christ had never occasion to retract any statement, to qualify any expression, to undo any thing he ever said or did.³¹ No omission, no slip, no error, no misapprehension, no gap or interruption in the cir-

³⁰ Bowdler.

³¹ St. Paul had to acknowledge, "I wist not, brethren, that it was the high priest:"—Acts xxiii. 5—but never thus the holy Jesus.

cle of human excellencies, appeared in our blessed Saviour.

The result was, that there was a PECULIAR HARMONY, loveliness, and moral symmetry in our Saviour's personal character; that beauty of holiness which arises from the combination and just proportion of all the various elements of which it is composed. Every thing was of a piece: every thing was most becoming; every thing was as it should be.

And this completes the picture. This shows that we have in our Lord the perfect model of every virtue for his disciples, both as it regards the separate graces of his character, and the union and combination of them in all their proportions, strength, and consistency.

But this leads us to consider the conduct and deportment of Christ, as compared with his pretensions.

III. IN HIS PUBLIC AND EXALTED CHARACTER AS THE FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

For all these separate parts of the life of Christ were subservient to one great purpose, the founding of the gospel Revelation; and each part prepared and qualified him for that great undertaking.

In order, then, to catch a view of the excellencies of this result, we may notice the public character of Christ, in its suitableness to man; in its surprising novelty and sublimity; in its correspondence with the doctrines and precepts of his religion; and in the united impression and effect of the whole;—all heightened by the artless manner in which the narration is written.

1. To begin with the topics which we have just been considering, it is impossible not to observe THE SUITABLENESS TO THE NECESSITIES OF MAN which appears in the founder of Christianity thus becoming our example. Man is led by example rather than by

precept. He needed a Saviour, not only to rescue him from guilt and death by his merits and grace, but to render virtue lovely and practicable, by his human and personal excellencies. In the life of Christ, morality is set forth in action; it is embodied, it is made visible to the mortal eye, and addressed to the mortal heart, in the most attractive and engaging form.

And how exactly was the **CLASS OF CHARACTER** and station which Christ occupied, adapted to our case! He might have chosen any other, and been a perfect model of virtue:—he might have appeared—except perhaps as his character as the Saviour of the world was concerned—as a prince, a noble, a teacher of human or divine science; but such a life would not have been so easily imitable by the great mass of mankind. Our Lord, therefore, became like one of ourselves; his life was spent in common affairs and duties. His is a most holy, but an ordinary, familiar, every-day life, passed in humble scenes and usual occurrences.³² This was exactly what proud, vain-glorious man needed.

Then our Lord's was a **SUFFERING** character, and so yet further adapted to be our pattern in a suffering world. Any other life might have been as pure, but it could not have been so consolatory. As a sufferer, his example is more frequently applicable, more deeply meditated on, more precisely suited to the condition and afflictions of his followers. The patient, enduring virtues are most conspicuous in him, as they are most needed by us.

It was also a **CALM, COMPOSED** character. There

³² "The imitation of the life of Jesus is a duty of that excellency and perfection, that we are blessed in it by its easiness, compliance, and proportion to us. For though he was without sin, yet the instances of his piety were the actions of a very holy, but ordinary life, without affrightment of precedent or prodigious acts, greater than the imitation of man—sweet and humane and gentle."—*Bishop J. Taylor.*

was a tranquillity, a retirement, a freedom from violent emotions, an abstinence from excitement and disturbance throughout it. His emotions were chiefly those of benevolence, compassion, abhorrence of sin. These overpowered, on all occasions, the inferior passions ; and were most directly in contrast with any charge of insincerity or enthusiasm, which his enemies might otherwise have imputed to him. Our Lord is precisely what he should be ;—he appeared, and did, and acted, and spake, in every respect as the founder of such a religion as Christianity required.†

2. Remark next THE SURPRISING NOVELTY AND SUBLIMITY of our Saviour's deportment and undertaking. His great purpose was entirely new and unheard of at the time he appeared upon earth ; it sprung completely from his own divine goodwill, and was independent, and indeed contrary, to the temper of the age and the outward condition in which he appeared. I do not like the term *original*,³³ as applied to our Lord's character, because we commonly mean by that word the efforts of unassisted genius, in the invention or execution of works of science or art.

But his whole project and manner of acting were novel ; were in no respect the product of external circumstances ; were not according to the taste of the age, and the sympathies of his countrymen. We know sufficiently of the spirit of his contemporaries, of the traditions, the disorders, the expectations of a temporal deliverer, the contempt for the Heathen and Samaritans, and even for Publicans and Nazarenes, which prevailed. We see in the disciples this impression of the age. Our Lord rises infinitely above it ; his character is not created by circumstances ; he forms his own project ; he conceives the new and vast design of an universal religion : he acts upon that

³³ Paley, and even Bishop Bird Sumner.

design, though not a single mind can sympathize with him ; he possesses his soul in patience, in the calm persuasion of the success of his undertaking : and yet every appearance was against it—the prejudices of the Jews, the notions of a temporal Messiah, the powers and authorities and intellectual habits of the whole world. And there was nothing in our Saviour's birth, connexions, education, to raise him above these things. Yet not a word escapes him implying a doubt of the ultimate triumphs of his religion. In all his teaching and life you see a consciousness, which never forsakes him, of a relation to the whole human race.³⁴ What a vast and noble design ; what superiority and grandeur of thought ; what self-possession and calmness in the pursuit ; what expanse of charity ; what height of benevolence ! And yet his own death was to intervene :—he perceives, he foretells, he calmly describes, the acts of violence which were about apparently to cut short all his projects. What words can convey the impression of the character of the divine founder of Christianity, when you view him as inspired and filled, under such circumstances, with this mighty plan, the salvation of mankind !

3. Remark, again, how the different parts of our Lord's character, springing from his twofold nature, exactly correspond with his undertaking, make it natural, and join on upon all the DOCTRINES AND PRECEPTS of Christianity which we considered in former Lectures.³⁵ We are no longer astonished at the enterprise of founding an universal religion, when we recollect that here is an incarnate Deity, the only begotten of the Father, the Lord mighty to save, the Eternal Word, come on an errand of grace. And when we turn to the human parts of his character, and consider them as the matter of his obedience, the

³⁴ Dr. Channing.

³⁵ Lect. XV. and XVI.

ground of his merits, the very sacrifice which he came to offer, the case is still further unfolded. The mystery, indeed, of the union of the divine with the human nature remains unexplained; but the fact of it is clearly laid down as the foundation of his mission, many of the ends of which it develops; whilst the combination of the qualities arising, without confusion, from the two natures, constitutes the peculiarity of our Lord's character as the founder of our faith. His divine and human nature correspond to the two classes of truths—the doctrines and precepts which compose his religion.

His divine nature and mediatorial office, together with the state of humiliation which is connected with them, precisely agree with the DOCTRINES of the fall and guilt of man, which rendered such a scheme of redemption needful and appropriate; that is, they precisely expound the truths which distinguish Revelation, and are, indeed, the facts on which those truths rest. The superhuman parts of Christ's life confirm all the doctrines dependent on his divinity—as the efficacy of his atonement, the merit of his sacrifice, the prevalence of his intercession. Without such parts, the doctrines would be less intelligible, less apparent, less consolatory; with them, all is congruous. If Jesus Christ were not the Eternal Word, the image of the invisible God; in short, the divine perfections embodied in human nature—the system of redemption would be incomplete. And if the system of redemption were other than it is, the character of Christ would be unaccountable and inappropriate.

And then how exactly do the human virtues of the lovely Saviour correspond with, or rather embody and realize, all the PRECEPTS of the gospel: his life is the precepts harmonized, exhibited. If man is ever to be won to obedience, it must be by the force of such an example, presented in so divine a person, and sustained by such exuberant grace.

4. Next remark the IMPRESSION AND EFFECT OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC CHARACTER of Christ—how the contemplations of the separate excellencies of his character are heightened when the mind proceeds to embrace the whole. The high and lofty parts are so united with the lowly and attractive; the divine qualities of our Lord with his human; what he did as the Son of God, with what he suffered as the Son of man; the claims of equality with the Father, with his voluntary subjection to him; the example he proposed to his followers, with the salvation which he wrought out for them; his deportment as our pattern, with his exalted conduct as the founder of the Christian Revelation: all is so sublime, and yet so condescending; so divine, and yet so human; so infinitely above us, and yet so familiarly known, and so entirely level to our feelings; the myterious parts are so softened down by the condescending ones; the authority and majesty are so blended with the compassion and kindness of Jesus, as to render the impression of the whole character beyond measure deep and penetrating. We feel that never did such a personage appear before or since. We feel that it is Deity incarnate; God stooping to man; the divine perfections made visible to mortal eye; the distance between the holy God and guilty sinners annihilated; salvation, joy, duty, motive, hope, resignation—all the Christian religion—concluded and comprehended in the brief but inexhaustible excellencies of the character of its founder.

5. This conviction is strengthened by observing, in the last place, the MANNER IN WHICH THE CHARACTER OF OUR LORD IS DRAWN BY THE EVANGELISTS. For the narrative, as we have before had the occasion to notice at some length,³⁶ is the most inartificial ever seen. There is no panegyric, no putting of things

³⁶ Lect. VI., on Credibility.

together, no drawing of a character, no apologies nor explanations. The evangelists merely relate faithfully what they severally remembered of one individual ; but this individual was so extraordinary a personage, that in recording his life, they present a picture such as the world never before saw. The account, however, only furnishes the materials from which we may study, as we can, our Lord's several excellencies. The evangelists leave us to do this. They do not even arrange the different incidents in the order of time. Thus the minds of men are set at work ; and the true impression and bearing of the history is the result of their own conclusions, from the incidents thrown together in naked and unadorned simplicity.

The very circumstance, indeed, of such a portrait being drawn by such writers, is an independent proof of the divine origin of the gospels. It could never have entered the mind of man. We know what efforts writers of the greatest genius have made in different ages to describe a perfect character. Poets, historians, philosophers, have laboured the point to the utmost. They have succeeded but imperfectly. Their entirely virtuous man has neither been amiable nor consistent nor imitable. Some gross defects have marked their first conceptions of the subject. But, behold ! four unlettered and simple persons, give separate narratives of the life of their Master, and accomplish unwittingly what men in all ages and countries have aimed at, but failed.³⁷ The gospels appear. The writers make no comments on the history they give ; and they leave a character, without seeming to think of it, which is found to be new, to be such as the mind of man could never have conceived ; and yet, at the same time, to be so lovely, so imitable, so dignified, so sublime, as to comprise, by universal consent, all the excellencies and perfections of which the human nature is sus-

³⁷ Scott.

ceptible, in a form the most engaging, tender, and elevated.

But we pause—and draw our argument to a close. We have taken a view of the peculiar character of our Lord as Mediator ; of his private deportment as our example ; and of his public and more elevated conduct as the founder of the Christian religion. The mind is lost in striving to collect the several parts.

We began with the various claims preferred by our Lord. We were startled at the variety and difficulty of them. We yet found, as we proceeded, every one established in the most ample and satisfactory manner. The impression of reverence increased as we reviewed his conduct as the Son of God and Saviour of the world, as the Teacher of mankind, as a Man of Sorrows, and the Rewarder of his disciples. We were yet more affected, as we considered the separate as well as combined excellencies of our Lord's personal conduct. When from this we proceeded to notice the public bearing of his life and ministry as the founder of our religion, we were only the more filled with astonishment at the majesty and sublimity of his character. The attempt to do justice to any portion of it is fruitless. It is difficult even to touch on the principal features. Enough, however, has been said to enable us to estimate the argument which it supplies in confirmation of our faith and love.

This argument, then, it will be found, springs from a FAIR PRESUMPTION upon the first statement of the case ; rises yet higher when that case is contrasted with EVERY SIMILAR PRETENSION ; proceeds upwards to a moral demonstration when the OTHER BRANCHES OF THE EVIDENCES are taken into account ; and ceases not its course till it BEARS AWAY THE HEART of every competent and serious inquirer.

1. For what is THE FAIR PRESUMPTION ON THE VERY STATEMENT OF THE CASE, after reviewing such a character as that of the founder of the Christian religion? The life and spirit of the author of any religious system, when truly known, go far to determine the truth of his claims. If real sincerity, purity, benevolence, humility, disinterestedness, consistency, appear in the founder of a religion; if that individual present himself openly before the eyes of men; if he submit all his pretensions to their scrutiny; if, in addition, there appear in him calmness, composure, meekness; every thing the most opposite to enthusiasm and credulity; these things afford a strong presumption in favour of his cause, just as the contrary qualities would be so many presumptions against it.

No personal virtues can, indeed, strictly speaking, establish a divine Revelation, which must wait for its proper proofs; but such a character as that of our Lord, supposes those proofs and implies them; it is altogether so peculiar, so far elevated above any other that ever appeared, as to furnish in itself the strongest presumption of the truth of his pretensions.

2. The presumptive argument is raised yet higher, BY CONTRASTING THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST WITH THAT OF ALL OTHERS who have assumed to be founders of a new religion. We challenge the whole world. We assert that there never was any religion but the Christian, which exhibited, in the person of its founder, a spotless model for its disciples to follow. We assert there never was any religion but the Christian, in which its author united excellence of example with purity of precept.³⁸ We assert there never was any religion but the Christian, which professed to sum up all morality in the example of its legislator; and

³⁸ Bishop James.

combined in it all the purest precepts, and the most lovely sentiments of moral excellency.

I look around for the founder of a religion with whom I may compare Jesus Christ. I see the masters of the philosophic sects ; I see the orators and reputed sages of Greece and Rome—all is impure and debased. I see Zeno, and Socrates, and Diogenes, and Epictetus, and Plato, and Aristotle ; I see Cicero, and Xenophon, and the Catos and Seneca—inconsistency, vanity, profligacy, folly, cowardice, revenge, idolatry, obscure the fame of all. I can discern no perfectly pure and unstained character ; I can select no model for the imitation of mankind. And then, I object to all these names. Not one is the founder of a religion. They were philosophers, discoursing in their petty academies, not authors of a system of religion, claiming the inspiration of Heaven, and professing to effect the spiritual deliverance of mankind. What I look for is the founder of a religious faith—independent, new, authoritative, ostensible.

The votaries of polytheism, with the fables entwined around their histories, come not up to my demand : and if they did, would only excite disgust, by their avowed profligacy, cruelty, and sordid covetousness. I want still the promulgator of a Revelation from heaven.

At length, I descry one arising obscurely in the eastern regions of Christendom, at a time when its primitive faith was peculiarly corrupted and debased. I SEE MAHOMET APPEAR. I obtain what I required ; I compare his claims ; I ask what were his professions ; what his personal character ; what his promises to his followers ; what the spirit he breathed ; what the example he set ? I have not long to wait for a reply. The case speaks for itself. I see him indulge in the grossest vices ; I see him transgressing perpetually even the licentious rules which he had prescribed to himself ; I hear him lay claim to a special commission from heaven to riot in the most unlimited sensuality.

This is more than enough for my argument. But I look again : I see him violent, rapacious, impetuous, sanguinary ; I see him pay court to the peculiar vices of the people amongst whom he wished to propagate his doctrine ; I see him promise, as the rewarder of his followers, a voluptuous paradise, where the objects of their base affections were to be almost innumerable, gifted with transcendent beauty and eternal youth. I can examine no further.

From a character so base, I turn to the holy Jesus ; I contrast—but I pause. I cannot insult your feelings by comparing all the points of ineffable purity and loveliness in the Founder of Christianity, with the compound of sensuality, pride, and cruelty, in the eastern impostor. You feel how the presumption of the truth of our religion is heightened, inconceivably heightened, by the contrast in the only case at all similar, found in the lapse of ages.³⁹

³⁹ Bishop Sherlock has admirably touched this argument. “ Go to your natural religion ; lay before her Mahomet and his disciples, arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword ; show her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements. Show her the prophet’s chamber, his concubines and wives ; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege Revelation and his divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression.

“ When she is tired with this prospect, then show her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and perverse : let her see him in his most retired privacy ; let her follow him to the mountain and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to see his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked ; let her attend him to the tribunals, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross ; and let her view him in the

3. But this presumption proceeds upwards to a moral demonstration, WHEN THE OTHER BRANCHES OF THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE ARE TAKEN INTO THE ACCOUNT. For we are to recollect that the holy life and astonishing loveliness and majesty in the conduct of our Lord are only a confirmatory evidence. They stand amongst our internal proofs. They are sustained by all those direct credentials of a messenger from heaven, which we exhibited in the first part of our course. We have this unparalleled holiness, this union of divine and human excellency in HIM, whom the prophecies pointed out as to appear at the very time and in the very manner he did, as about to bear this very character, and perform these very miracles, and teach this self-same doctrine. We have this mingled glory and humiliation and innocency in HIM, whose astonishing miracles testified that he was the messenger of the Almighty and the Saviour of the world. In a word, all the mass of external testimony which surrounds the divine revelation of the Bible, pours its full effulgence upon the person of Jesus Christ; whilst the person and works of Jesus Christ fulfil the prophecies, include the miracles, are followed by the propagation of the religion, and are developed in its prominent and abiding good effects upon mankind. In like manner, all the internal proofs are, as it were, only a part of the life of Christ. The adaptation of Christianity to the state and wants of man, its sublime doctrines, its spotless morals, are comments on the gracious and condescending character, the meritorious sacrifice, the immaculate personal virtues of

agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors,—
 ‘ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

“ When natural religion has viewed both, ask—which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had, when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross; by him she spake and said, ‘ Truly, this man was the Son of God.’ ”—*Bishop Sherlock's Sermons*, 1. 271.

the Son of God. This coincidence carries up to a moral demonstration the presumption which the isolated argument furnished, and which the contrast between the founders of every other religion, or rather the base impostor Mahomet and our Lord, raised to a greater height. We see the incontrovertible force of the moral demonstration: we feel the utmost repose and satisfaction of mind; we recline with entire acquiescence of soul upon a Saviour, whose external credentials are so inseparably united with the personal wonders of his unexampled life.

Indeed, the infidel himself is compelled to bow to this irresistible argument, obstinately as he may refuse to believe practically in the Son of God. The facts of our Lord's history he does not dispute. Our heathen and Jewish adversaries, contemporaries with the apostles, admit these.⁴⁰ The purity and innocency of our Lord's life are admitted even by the most sceptical of their number. Paine himself stands mute before the lovely and unspotted character of our Saviour. Rousseau confesses the unparalleled beauty and attraction of his virtues. Chubb, Bolingbroke, Hobbes, all join in this acknowledgment.⁴¹ We ask for no greater

⁴⁰ Lect. V. p. 141.

⁴¹ "Is it possible that he whose history the gospel records can be but a mere man? Does he speak in the tone of an enthusiast, or of an ambitious sectary? What mildness, what purity in his manners! What touching grace in his instructions, what elevation in his maxims! what profound wisdom in his discourses! what presence of mind! what ingenuity, and what justness in his answers! what government of his passions! What prejudice, what blindness or ill faith must that be which dares to compare the son of Sophroniscus with the Son of Mary! What a difference between the two! Socrates dying without pain, without disgrace, easily sustains his part to the last.—The death of Socrates philosophizing tranquilly with his friends, is the mildest that could be desired: that of Jesus expiring in torments, injured, mocked, cursed by all the people, is the most horrible that can be feared. Socrates, taking the empoisoned cup, blesses him who presents

admissions. And when the unbeliever evades the consequences, as he does, by plunging into objections against the matter of Revelation, we remind him that the ignorance and presumption of that man must be fearful indeed, who, admitting the being and providence of one supreme and infinitely glorious God, and conceding the facts of the holy life of Christ, and the establishment of his gospel in the face of an opposed and hostile world, can venture to set up himself as a judge of his Maker, and pretend to be wiser than the Almighty.⁴²

From such unreasonable men I turn,

4. To the thoughtful and docile hearer, and observe that our argument ceases not in its course, till it BEARS AWAY THE HEART, AND STRENGTHENS ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR INDIVIDUAL BELIEF AND LOVE.

Yes, I speak to the young who have been brought up in the Christian Faith—who have heard from their infancy of the character of their Lord—who have had his meek and tender example placed before their eyes—who have been taught to lisp his name ; and I ask them, Do you believe in the only begotten Son of God ? I ask, Do you repose on his sacrifice, for pardon ? Do you rely on his intercession ? Do you implore his promised Spirit ? Do you trust in his promises ? Do you desire to behold his glory ?

Yes, I have gained my point with you. However your faith may have been shaken by the scoffs or the example of the wicked, you are attracted to a return to your duty, by the ineffable majesty and grace of Jesus Christ. You behold him once again ; and his

it to him with tears. Jesus, in the midst of a frightful punishment, prays for his enraged executioners. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage ; the life and death of Jesus are those of a God."—*Rousseau, Emile.*

⁴² Lect. XXI.

matchless condescension, loveliness, dignity, win your heart. You feel him to be your brother, your companion, your compassionate guide ; you see him to be your Master, your Redeemer, your Saviour. You believe him to be the way, the truth, the life, the rock, the refuge, the only hope of a lost world.

Cleave to him then with more affectionate devotion of soul. It has been said, that if virtue could appear upon earth, she would attract by her beauties the love of mankind. This may be doubted, even as to the narrow notions of virtue entertained by the heathen philosopher who uttered the sentiment.⁴³ Certainly, when perfect virtue in its most benevolent form appeared on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, it was rejected, despised, calumniated. Probably to the most perverse and sensual heart of man, no object is so formidable, so disconcerting, so inexplicable, as the unparalleled holiness and majesty of our Lord.⁴⁴ But let it be your care to realize the supposition. Let incarnate virtue attract your love. Let your faith be more and more animated with devout and reverent, but affectionate and grateful admiration. Remember what your Saviour hath done for you—what glory it was which he left—what humiliation it was he sustained—what sufferings they were which he exhausted—what recompence he promises. And he only bids you to love him in return, to follow his guidance, to imitate his example, to tread in his steps. Yes, this is Christianity—JESUS CHRIST, AND HIM CRUCIFIED—Jesus Christ in the merit of his death ; Jesus Christ in the efficacy of his Holy Spirit ; Jesus Christ in the purity of his example. Let this be ever engraven on

⁴³ Plato.

⁴⁴ "The character of Christ is more incomprehensible to the natural reason of a carnal man than the deepest mysteries, more improbable than the greatest miracles ; of all the particulars of the gospel history, the most trying to the evil heart of unbelief."—*Horsley's Sermons*, &c.

your hearts—the result of Christianity, where it is successful, the end which it proposes, is the salvation of man from sin, his perfect reconciliation with God, his holy obedience in this world, his enjoyment of eternal happiness in the next—that is, his union with Jesus Christ, his assimilation to Jesus Christ, his partaking of the benefits of Jesus Christ, his following the virtues of Jesus Christ, his spending eternity with Jesus Christ—“where is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ Psalm xvi. 11.

LECTURE XVIII.

THE TENDENCY OF CHRISTIANITY TO PROMOTE
IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE THE TEMPORAL AND
SPIRITUAL HAPPINESS OF NATIONS AND IN-
DIVIDUALS.

LUKE ii. 13, 14.

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude
of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
goodwill towards men.*

WE considered in one of our former lectures the more obvious good effects which Christianity has produced.¹ We ranged this subject amongst the External Evidences, because the positive fruits of the Christian doctrine had become, during the lapse of ages, a solid, tangible proof, distinguishable from the internal character and structure of the religion ; and lying open to the observation of mankind, like the facts which establish the credibility of the gospel narrative, or those which prove the divine propagation and preservation of Christianity amongst mankind.

¹ Vol. I. Lect. XI.

We now come to consider the tendency of Christianity to promote, in the highest degree, the temporal and spiritual welfare of individuals and nations ; a topic which arises, indeed, from that to which we have referred, but which goes much farther, and forms another species of proof.

The more prominent benefits already conferred on the world by Christianity, is one thing ; its tendency to produce yet higher and more numerous benefits, is another. The first is an external proof ; the second an internal. The first accompanies the religion from without, and lies open to the observation of every candid inquirer ; the second springs from the constitution and frame-work of the religion from within, and demands a more familiar knowledge and closer attention. The one is a primary evidence of Christianity ; the other a subsidiary, going to confirm the proper proofs supposed to be known.

This innate bearing and working of Christianity towards effects far more extensive and permanent than any which it has yet produced, is, indeed, one of the most forcible of the Internal Evidences. It is also a subject peculiarly suitable to an age like the present. There is nothing which men in a high state of mental culture more regard than the tendencies of things. This is the standard by which they judge. They not only consider what effects are already produced by principles, but what is their native and essential force—what would be the consequences if hindrances were removed, and they were allowed their full scope and operation. Much of human prudence and forethought rests on this obvious dictate of wisdom. The separate acts of men for good or for evil—the separate discoveries in science and art—the separate measures of the statesman and legislator, are not the points which occupy our chief concern. It is the tendency of their separate acts ; it is the principles from which they spring, their bearing upon habits, their possible ex-

tension to all the interests of science and all the commercial and moral prosperity of a nation, that give them their real importance. Single violations of law, also, would often be less attended to by the magistrate, if it were not for the natural tendency of such violations to undermine all authority and bring in universal confusion. It is the recollection of this tendency of crime which arms the judge with inflexibility even upon the first offence, and which inspires the peaceful citizen with acquiescence in his decisions.

Now what we have to prove in the present Lecture is that the strong and essential tendency of the Christian religion, is to produce the utmost measure of individual and national happiness; that it is constantly working towards this result, and that when hindrances are removed, it will actually produce it.

But how are we to judge in such a case? How can we most clearly bring out a proof, which, if established, will constitute one of the most convincing of the internal evidences of our faith?

We cannot, perhaps, proceed better than by considering how we argue in somewhat similar cases. For example, the tendency of reason to subdue brute force is universally admitted. So again, the tendency of moral virtue to overcome vice, and of natural religion or the fear of God to triumph over sin and profaneness, is allowed by all who believe in the being and perfections of the great Creator.*

Now in what way are these tendencies demonstrated? Is it not by first considering the direction which they take—the aim, the object, the scope of each?

When this is ascertained, is it not by considering the hindrances which brute force, or vice, or sin and irreligion, oppose to the tendency under consideration?

Do we not next weigh the effects actually produced

* Bp. Butler.

by the principles under review, as the hindrances are more or less removed? We take, for instance, a case where the obstacles are most numerous; another where they are less so; a third, where they are almost entirely cleared away. And if we find, that in proportion as the obstacles are diminished, the good effects increase—and this uniformly, under many varieties of circumstances, at different times and distant parts of the world—we conclude that the tendency is genuine and strong.

We thence infer that if all the obstacles were removed, the full effects of the principle would appear, and the greatest possible happiness be produced which the case admitted of:—that is, the greatest possible happiness which reason, moral virtue, or the religion of nature, was calculated to bring out.

Let us apply this method to the Christian doctrine, which goes far beyond mere reason, virtue, or religion, when unassisted by the light and grace of Revelation; and which, carrying on these lower principles to their utmost height, rises above them, adds the discovery of facts, of doctrines, of divine aids, to which they were strangers, and bestows on man, first, all the happiness, both temporal and spiritual, of which his circumstances in this world admit; and then conducts him to that eternal bliss which neither reason, nor virtue, nor natural religion, could discover or secure.

Let us examine, then, the tendency of the Christian doctrine, as we would that of the principles to which we have referred. Let us carefully observe the end to which it is invariably directed. Let us consider the obstacles which are known to impede its course. Let us examine its operations at successive periods and under different circumstances. Let us discover whether the end originally aimed at and invariably pursued, is more nearly accomplished in proportion as the known obstacles are diminished. We shall then have a right to conclude that if all the hindrances were

removed and nothing left to check its genuine force, the result would be, the greatest possible happiness which the religion was designed to bring out—that is, the highest temporal and spiritual welfare of individuals and nations.

These are then our four points—The DIRECTION which Christianity takes—The HINDRANCES which are opposed to it—Its SUCCESS in proportion to the removal of them—The ULTIMATE EFFECTS which it will produce when all obstacles shall be cleared away. We consider,

I. THE DIRECTION WHICH CHRISTIANITY TAKES—the object at which it invariably aims: this we must first ascertain. The gospel can never have an essential tendency towards the highest temporal and spiritual happiness of individuals and nations, unless this is the direction which it takes, and takes clearly, invariably, and with a native force.

And surely much need not be said on this part of the argument. For what means the adaptation of Christianity to the state and wants of man,³ but that it aims at restoring a fallen world, at opening fully its disease, applying an adequate remedy, and producing the greatest possible happiness?

What means the scheme of Christian doctrine,⁴ centering in the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, but that Christianity has a direct tendency to bless man, to raise him to pardon, to peace of conscience, and to the hope of everlasting life?

What are the morals⁵ of Christianity, but another name for a powerful tendency and bias towards human happiness?

What means the example of our Lord,⁶ but that Christianity carries with it the strongest movement towards benevolence, purity, love to God and man?

³ Lecture XIV.

⁵ Lecture XVI.

⁴ Lecture XV.

⁶ Lecture XVII.

What, in short, is there in the Christian Revelation which does not strongly bear upon man's temporal and spiritual welfare—that does not tend to communicate KNOWLEDGE and HOLINESS⁷—two words which comprehend the whole of practical religion, and the whole of true happiness?

There is a genuine, strong, essential bias in every part of the gospel, to elevate man, to deliver him from intellectual and moral bondage, to fill his mind with light, and truth, and purity, and love; to engage him in the pursuit of the highest object, and aid him in following it; to unite him, in short, with God, the centre of felicity, and qualify him for the enjoyment of his presence.

Reason is not more evidently directed towards human happiness, nor virtue, nor natural religion, than revealed truth tends to the utmost degree of man's present and future welfare. These principles, indeed, cannot be compared for a moment with the gospel; because, through the fall and corruption of man, they are incapable of communicating the highest felicity. Man wants something more than mere reason or moral virtue, or the light of nature. He requires salvation, a way of forgiveness, a spring of new life and strength for obedience, a clear revelation of immortality. If, therefore, reason and its kindred powers are allowed to have a tendency towards human happiness, how much more has Christianity that bearing, which embraces all, and more than all, that conscience and tradition ever taught, and which superadds a peculiar method of redemption of its own, by the Son and Spirit of God?

And this, indeed, is one proof of its powerful innate virtue, that it comes down to MAN'S ACTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES, and bears upon him as he is. It does not take for granted certain previous points which do not

⁷ Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 10.

in reality exist; as, that such and such good effects will follow, if men obey reason, if they are virtuous, if they are under a good form of government. This is the error of the mere moralist and philosopher. Fine-spun theories are devised; but which do not take up man as he is, and therefore produce little or no effect.

It is the glory of Christianity, that its energy appears in its bearing upon man in his actual state of disorder, ignorance, and guilt. It is essentially a remedial system.

The science of medicine has not more evidently a tendency to our temporal welfare and the prolongation of life, because it comes to man with all his diseases, and works beneficially upon him in this state, than Christianity has a tendency to his moral and spiritual welfare.

So essential, indeed, is this bias, that Christianity HAS NO OTHER. It abstains from all inferior objects, which might weaken and turn aside its force. It keeps aloft in its high vocation. It wisely forbears to intermingle with the strife of men. It appears only as the minister of truth, the herald of peace, the assuager of human woe, the teacher of good things; the enemy of all that is unjust, cruel, impure; the friend of all that is right, chaste, benevolent; the child of heaven, and the preparer for its joys.

And if this be the bearing of the gospel as to individuals, what is it AS TO NATIONS? Its tendency, indeed, here cannot be so obvious, because Christianity is a practical thing, and therefore can only have its proper seat in the individual. But what are nations but masses of individuals? What is social, but the multiplication of personal, happiness? What is it that makes up families, neighbourhoods, cities, nations, kingdoms, but a multitude of individuals? It is quite obvious, then, that if Christianity takes the direction

of personal happiness, it promotes also national and universal.

It does this directly as well as indirectly. It does it **DIRECTLY**, because it is the very foundation of society. It is a system of righteousness. Sterling truth, equity, justice, without which society cannot subsist, are no where so forcibly inculcated as in the Christian religion.

Then it supplies the defects of human laws. It is seated in the conscience, it interposes a Divine tribunal, it regards the secret intention of man, it goes to the principle of obedience, it restrains not by fear of punishment merely, but by the innate desire to please God and benefit our fellow-creatures. What are oaths, without Christianity as their basis? What are human statutes, without the authority of the supreme Legislator?

Again : Christianity goes to subdue the selfishness of man, and implant that regard for the welfare of others which is the spring of genuine patriotism and devotion to the good of our country. And what, I ask, must be the working of that religion whose main object is to eradicate the selfish passions?

And why should I speak of the bearings of the charity of Christianity, of its spirit of beneficence, its forgiveness of injuries, its delight in communicating good, its genuine, diffusive, heartfelt sympathy? Must not all this go to the cementing together the society of mankind, and the rendering nations one great and united family?

And what is the tendency of all the Christian precepts—of its relative duties, its rules for the lowest and highest orders of society, its prescriptions of loyalty and subjection to the powers that be ; of the commands which restrain, animate, and direct every class of persons in a state ; the injunctions which go to extinguish the causes of disunion, turbulence, sedition, war ?

Again : how can we speak adequately of the **INDIRECT** tendency of the gospel to advance the temporal and spiritual welfare of nations ? For there is this of remarkable in Christianity, that none can approach within its sphere of influence, without deriving some advantage from it. It indirectly works upon thousands whom it never persuades to receive its yoke. It operates by the medium of others. It raises the standard of morals. It induces large bodies of men to imitate, in various respects, the conduct of its genuine disciples. It deters from evil by the means of shame, of an enlightened conscience, of the fear of exposure. Each Christian is a centre of influence, in which his example and instructions are continually operating.

Thus by degrees public opinion begins to work ; and as this spreads, it reaches magistrates and nobles, it sways the minds of legislators, it opens the ears of princes, it leads to national measures in honour of Almighty God, and for the propagation and support of revealed religion ; and thus it brings down that blessing upon states which is the spring of real prosperity.

Thus Christianity is, like a powerful under-current, flowing beneath the main stream of life, which, without mingling or defiling itself with the troubled waters, pursues its pure, though unseen course, preserving its original virtue, and ready to burst forth and fertilize all around, as external obstacles are removed.

But this leads us to notice—

II. THE HINDRANCES WHICH IMPEDE THE FULL EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ; for this is the next branch of our argument. The strength of any tendency may be judged of, in a good measure, by the known obstacles against which it has to work. We estimate the genuine bearing of reason by considering the brute force which is opposed to it ; we measure the real bias of virtue by the resistance which

vice puts forth against it ; we discern the tendency of natural religion by the counteracting power of sin and profaneness. There would be no tendency, properly speaking, in any of these cases, if there were no strong impeding principles—all would be effect, not tendency.

Against the Christian religion, then, there are opposing forces drawn up, which will assist us in gauging its essential leaning towards the highest good of man.

For fearful are these obstacles ; narrow have been hitherto the limits of real Christianity ; numerous are the impediments which hedge it in. I know the difficulty of treating in a clear and perspicuous manner this part of our argument. The mind is prone to hasty and most unreasonable conclusions. We see hindrances, we see Christianity checked on every hand : we confound facts with causes.

But if we examine the real state of things, we shall see that the obstacles spring from a source extrinsic from Christianity ; that they are incidental and temporary, not essential and permanent ; and that they serve to demonstrate the innate force of the Christian doctrine, which makes head against them, and is gradually overcoming them.

For what are the chief hindrances with which Christianity has to contend ? Are they not the hostility of some, and the neglect of others ? Is not the enmity of the human heart to the main doctrines and precepts of Revelation, a principal barrier against its progress ? Does not also indifference and apathy to these peculiarities disincline man from entertaining the religion ? Besides these obstacles, do not the vices of its false adherents, and the crimes and hypocrisy of its pretended friends, form another formidable impediment—to which must be added the various imperfections and errors of sincere Christians themselves ? Then take in the more public obstacles presented by corruptions

of the Christian doctrines introduced into churches—the contagion of heresy, the vices and unfaithfulness of many of the ministers and professed teachers of Christianity; to say nothing of the apostacies in the East and West, which have left little of Christianity in those quarters except the name. The persecutions directed, from time to time, against the sincere disciples of the religion, must be added; as well as the fearful neglect, with regard to religious influence, of which princes and legislators have too frequently been guilty. Then the judicial infatuation permitted by Almighty God, in punishment of infidelity and obstinate resistance to duty, must be considered. And, lastly, the great spiritual adversary, who either “deceiveth the nations;” or “walketh about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”^a

Such are the known obstacles which impede the course of Christianity. And whence do they arise? Surely not from the gospel itself, but from a totally different source, the depravity and perverseness of man. They are therefore so far from belonging to Christianity, that they form a part of that disease, which it is aiming to cure. The corruption of man, be it ever remembered, was not introduced by the Christian Revelation, nor in consequence of it; it is a condition of mankind existing as much under natural as revealed religion. Christianity finds man perverse, corrupt, vicious; and brings in the only efficient remedy—a remedy the tendencies of which are to overcome that corruption in every form. The science of medicine is not less a healing process, nor less beneficial in its tendency, because multitudes will not follow its directions, and various diseases do not at once yield to its power. The reign of a virtuous and beneficent prince, does not less tend towards the best welfare of his sub-

^a Rev. **xx.** 3; 1 Pet. v. 8.

jects, because there may be obstacles to the full execution of his designs, in the political constitution or moral habits of the people whom he governs.

The hindrances, then, to Christianity are extrinsic and foreign, not innate and peculiar. They are incidental, not essential and permanent. They are not inherent in the religion, but arise from an entirely distinct cause, the depravity of man. The true tendency and bearing of the Christian Revelation, is not to create or augment those hindrances, but to work against and overcome them. As well might brute force be said to spring from reason, or vice to arise from virtue, or profaneness and sin from the fear of God, as corruption and disorder from the Christian Revelation—that corruption and disorder which we find to be in fact partially removed, which yields continually to the moral force which the gospel brings to bear upon it, and which, in truth, is the gauge and measure of the true tendency of the religion.

For as the tendency of a fountain to ascend, is judged of by the superincumbent earth through which it makes its way, and as the strength of a river-barrier is estimated by the resisting force of the current; so the virtue and bias of Christianity are measured by the mighty obstacles which it is perpetually overcoming. He that knows best the deep corruption of human nature—he that understands most adequately the hostility of man to real religion, and his apathy to invisible and spiritual things; he who has surveyed most widely the vices and crimes of the false friends of Christianity; he who is most familiar with the history of the corruptions in the visible church, and who knows best the mis-directed influence of governors and princes;—can form the soundest judgment of the force of the obstacles which oppose the progress of Christianity, and can discern most clearly, amidst those various impediments, the innate and essential virtue of the religion which is working against them.

The hindrances, then, are known, and placed boldly before the mind. I dwell not on the judicial infatuation which falls upon nations or individuals as a punishment of sin; nor on the great spiritual adversity; because these are most obviously extrinsic from the Christian religion, and derive their existence or force from the very corruption of man, which is, properly speaking, the only obstacle by which the native flow of Christianity is impeded and restrained.

Let us proceed next to consider,

III. THE SUCCESS OF CHRISTIANITY IN PROPORTION TO THE REMOVAL OF THESE HINDRANCES.

For in this manner we judge of the tendency of a principle. After considering its known obstacles, we examine its success under different circumstances. We take a view of it in a most unfavourable, a less unfavourable, and an actually favourable position. If we consider the case of reason, for instance, we inquire whether, under circumstances more or less advantageous, its success is proportionate. We do the same with virtue and with natural religion. The more numerous are the experiments we make, in times the most distant from each other, at places the most remote, and with nations and individuals under every variety of situation, the clearer is our demonstration. Accordingly, in the cases alleged, all with whom we are concerned—that is, all who allow the existence and perfections of Almighty God—admit the conclusion. They find that reason succeeds and works its beneficial effects in exact proportion as hindrances are removed. They find that this holds under all circumstances, in all places, and all times. They perceive that, in certain positions of things, brute force may gain the day for a moment; and that it never wholly disappears, or rarely so, even when overcome. But remarking the uniform power which reason puts forth, as extrinsic hindrances are cleared away, they draw

their inferences as to its essential and innate tendency. So with regard to virtue and the religion of nature.

And thus we argue as it respects Christianity. We appeal to facts. Let us take the religion, under very different circumstances ; let us examine it in various places and at various times ; let us look to nations and individuals, under all peculiarities of advantage or disadvantage ; let us consider its operation as it is now in progress before our eyes ; let us recollect the new and unexpected principles which it set at work ; let us bear in mind the warning which its records afford us of many of its chief obstacles. The proof will be strengthened by every step in the argument. Grant me your attention.

I say nothing of the first propagation of Christianity, because such means were then employed by the Almighty as exempt it from ordinary rules. But take the AGE FOLLOWING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GOSPEL. I ask what is the tendency which Christianity actually put forth ? What is the evidence of facts ? What did the religion do for human happiness, both individual and national ? I ask, what were the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, and other converts, before Christianity reached them, and in the age after it had begun its operation ? Had it not brought them from darkness to light, from degrading ignorance, superstition, vice, misery ; to knowledge, holiness, joy ? And when it had done this in some considerable measure, did it not go on as a leaven, to leaven, as it were, the whole mass of their intellectual and moral character ? And continually as new converts were made, were not these a seed of activity in their several stations ? Did not Christianity soon put to shame many of the grossest vices of heathenism ? Was not an influence generated all around, which, like a heavenly fragrance, diffused refreshment and life far and near ?

Take the **NEXT AGES**. See the progress of the religion under the Roman emperors. Mark its sway when the Christian emperor removed so many external obstacles. What did Christianity do? how did she put forth her virtues? how did she break out, as a fountain whose streams had been choked, when relieved from hindrances?

Trace the religion in the **FOLLOWING CENTURIES**, as human corruption accumulated around it again, and almost extinguished its light and grace in the East and West. See it working its way amongst the Waldenses and Albigenes; see Claudius of Turin, and Waldo and Bernard, and others, defending the sacred doctrine, and demonstrating again its genuine tendencies on human happiness.

Come down to the glorious period of the **REFORMATION**, when, after ten centuries of darkness, and neglect of real Christianity, and of the triumph, though not universal, of superstition and idolatry, Luther and his associate reformers brought the gospel again to light, and appealed from the traditions of men to the inspired word of God. What was the tendency? what bearing had Christianity? what progress did it make, in proportion as the outward hindrances were removed?

Take any **SUBSEQUENT AGE**. Consider the individuals and nations gained from time to time from heathenism, or from gross corruptions of Christianity. Examine the benefits, the positive benefits, which Christianity first produced, and then pushed forth its tendencies to the highest measure of attainable happiness. I appeal now, not to reasoning, but to matters of fact. Mark any individual who has, in any age, really received the religion. I ask, what has been the bearing of Christianity upon his intellectual and moral powers, upon his conscience, his heart, his domestic affections? What has his religion tended to make him? How far, and in what direction, has

it aimed at carrying him beyond the point of his actual attainments? Watch him through life. Compare the tendency of one year's growth, with that of forty or fifty years. Compare it when circumstances have been most favourable for its development ; when they have been less favourable ; and when they have been positively disadvantageous ; and you will find the effects proportionate. The man has been advancing in all the essentials of happiness ; in all the elements of inward peace and external tranquillity ; in all the passive as well as active virtues, which render him a blessing to himself and a blessing to others.

The proportion holds with regard to NATIONAL WELFARE. The tendency becomes discernible as soon as a country has received the Christian faith ; it becomes more distinct the longer the operation continues. As public opinion is elevated, and princes and legislators are swayed by its dictates, the spirit of improvement grows ; one evil after another is detected ; institutions, in harmony with Christian benevolence, arise ; habits and practices of a contrary nature drop off ; all becomes more pure in domestic life, more paternal in government, more pacific and secure in public council.

In a word, wherever the moral engine has been employed, it has brought its new and unlooked-for means to bear ; the inward mechanism has put forth its powers ; the play and subservience of its parts one on the other has shown their wonderful effects. In proportion to the opportunity which has been afforded, and the extrinsical hindrances which have been removed, its genuine operation has gone on. It has raised up man from the depths of misery, and has blessed him in every relation of life—as a subject of civil society, as a member of the domestic circle, as a reasonable and accountable creature, as an heir of immortality.

But this tendency is STILL IN PROGRESS. It is at

work before our eyes. It is not an operation which took place merely in other times, and which is recorded by the pen of the ecclesiastical historian ; but it is now going on. Look around you. See the Christian faith exerting its genuine virtue every day, just as the incumbent weight of hindrances is lightened. The symptoms of a general amendment in individuals, and the nations of the world, wherever Revelation is in force, are numerous and undoubted. The work of God not only began at the first dawn of Revelation, and received a new impulse at the promulgation of the gospel, but is still in progress in the present day. The spirit of Christianity is gaining more and more an ascendancy, in proportion as the known obstacles are lessened, and by that gradual process, in which, from the very nature of the means employed, the work must be expected to proceed.' For God puts in use, ordinarily, no other means than truth, persuasion, example, accompanied by the secret influences of grace. The progress of the work, therefore, will not only be gradual, but will be liable to temporary interruptions ; so that at times it may seem not only to stand still, but even to go back, as often as particular circumstances in the affairs of men raise up extraordinary opposition to the doctrines or precepts of the gospel. But the progress upon the whole is undoubted. During the last thirty years, the virtue of Christianity has been making its way strenuously ; it has undone the mischiefs of a declining religion, and of semi-infidelity in some countries ; and has repaired the desolations of open unbelief in others. As these obstacles have been removed, it has diffused a revived sense of religion in the Old and the New World. It has circulated Bibles ; sent forth missionaries ; set in motion universal education ; raised the tone of public sentiment ; abolished many old unchristian practices ; carried men on towards substantial happiness.

Christianity is not an exhausted mine ; its treasures are not impoverished—they are not even diminished by the lapse of ages : but, like some rich and extensive, though latent, bed of ore, it opens its wealth in proportion as the oppressive hindrances are cleared away ; it presents new veins on every side according as it is explored, and retains all its power of rewarding most abundantly the toil of the workmen.

This conclusion is strengthened by considering that almost all the tendency of our religion **ARISES FROM PRINCIPLES NEW TO MAN**, which have worked themselves into confidence by the progress of time and the testimony of experience. The tendencies of reason, of virtue, of religion in its general acceptation, are indeed such as men might always have expected. We understand the grounds on which they are constantly making their way against the opposing impediments. But look at Christianity. Who amongst the wise of this world ever conceived that this new religion, the scoff of the Greek, and the object of contempt to the Jew, contained in it the principles of human happiness, the only vital seeds of individual and national improvement ! Who at first conceived that supreme love to one almighty Creator ; confession of guilt and depravity ; renunciation of any desert of our own ; reliance on the death of the Son of God, crucified as a malefactor ; dependance on the agency of the Holy Spirit ; humility, meekness, and love to our enemies ; submission of the understanding to a Revelation, in many respects mysterious and incomprehensible ; a predominant regard for the favour of God and the concerns of eternity ;—who ever dreamed that these, and such-like principles, contained the germ of all felicity ; when the very terms could not be understood without difficulty, and, when understood, conveyed ideas in open hostility with the intellectual habits of mankind ? ¹⁰ And yet it is by these principles, brought

¹⁰ Bishop J. Bird Sumner.

out into action, that Christianity has been achieving her triumphs; and achieving them just as the known obstacles, pride and prejudice, were overcome. The positive effects of Christianity, by means of such principles, are so many declarations of the great Governor of all in their favour.¹¹ They prove that there attends Christianity something more than truth, and knowledge, and persuasion; that there is an operation of grace, secret to us, which goes along with it, and infuses into it a virtue and bias, which only requires scope for its development, to expand into the highest measure of individual and national happiness.

Nor is it a small consideration, in addition to what we have been observing, that Christianity has positively FOREWARNED ITS DISCIPLES OF THE OBSTACLES which would impede its progress, has suspended its ultimate success on a long series of intermediate struggles, and has especially marked out the eastern and western apostacies, and the power of the delusion accompanying them, as amongst its chief hindrances, permitted for the punishment of preceding unfaithfulness in professed Christian nations. What did our Lord forewarn his followers in every age to expect, but persecution, resistance, reproach, perverse disputations? What are the histories of the seven Asiatic churches as sketched by the pen of inspiration? What is the apostacy of the latter days? What the mystic twelve hundred years of the church's depressed state,—but so many clues to the labyrinth in which we actually find ourselves? And what can prove a genuine tendency to human happiness, inserted in the very frame-work of our religion, if all these warnings do not evince it? For a system which has been working up against impediments in every age, and displaying its energy in proportion as they have been removed—which is doing this now before our eyes, by means of principles which man never could have

¹¹ Butler.

discovered—and which has foreseen and marked in its own records the opposing hindrances ; must have received a divine impulse at first, and must be attended with a divine operation now, which give it the supernatural tendency which it displays towards the welfare of man.

Let us then consider,

IV. THE ULTIMATE EFFECTS WHICH CHRISTIANITY WILL PRODUCE WHEN ALL OBSTACLES ARE REMOVED.

For if we argue, in the case of reason, of moral virtue, or of general religion, that their several tendencies would rush forth into full effects, if the known hindrances were taken away ; surely we may infer in a like manner concerning Christianity, that, considering the end it originally aimed at, the obstacles against which it has worked, and its success under every variety of circumstances, in proportion as these impediments were removed—that, supposing these impediments all cleared away, it would break forth like a copious river, when the dam is withdrawn, and pour its rich and abundant blessings on the whole human race. This is the ultimate consummation which all prophecy foretells, towards which the prayers and aspirations of Christians have been in every age directed, and the tendency to produce which it has been the object of this Lecture to demonstrate. But sufficient time must be allowed for this development of the ultimate bearing of Christianity ; and this according to its own scheme—that is, the trial must not be a partial one, but must have fair scope for its operation.

And here it is, that Christianity shines forth in its divine splendour. It is not, like the works of man, a brief, narrow, contiguous design—it is a scheme connected with all the ages of this world, and stretching over into eternity. We are at present in an incomplete course of things. We are in a system which is

only partially developed. We see already the strong tendencies of the religion ; we see, as the hindrances are partially removed, its real power and influence on individuals and the affairs of the world. But we have never yet seen its full energy. It has never yet had the fair occasion for displaying all its innate virtue to bestow temporal and spiritual blessings. We must wait. How gradual is the plan of the Almighty may be gathered from the four thousand years occupied in making room and disposing the affairs of the world, for the establishment of the gospel. Slow and imperceptible in its progress, it is still going on. The real tendency of Christianity will at length be demonstrated, when, all intervening obstacles being removed, its promises shall become facts, and its buddings and springings a rich and fruitful harvest.

And it is not a little remarkable that all competent judges, including adversaries, admit, that if the Christian religion were acted upon by mankind, the result would be an unexampled degree of general happiness. Men of all characters, even unbelievers themselves, if we except a few of the very grossest ; statesmen and legislators of all ages since the promulgation of the gospel ; philosophers and moralists of almost every school, unite in their admissions of the excellent tendency of the Christian religion. Many of them are ignorant of its true principles, yet they allow, with one consent, its beneficial tendency upon states and kingdoms—they would have all men Christians from mere regard to the peace of the world ; they admit that if mankind were under its practical guidance, the earth would present a scene of happiness, such as has never yet been witnessed nor conceived of.

Of any other religion, or pretended remedy for human evils, who that understands the question, would honestly wish for the universal diffusion, or would augur from that diffusion universal happiness ? Who would wish all mankind Epicureans, Stoics, Jewish

Pharisees? Who would desire to see any form of Polytheism universally prevalent? Who would wish the whole human race Mahometans? Who would desire infidelity or human philosophy to establish itself every where as the sole guide of man? Conscience speaks plainly enough when such a supposition is made. But who that knows what Christianity is, but would most heartily, and from his utmost soul, desire that all the world were Christians? Who does not feel that Christianity is pregnant with tendencies and seeds of things, which want only a clear field, to turn the world into a second paradise?

Suppose only one nation truly under the government of our holy faith—imagine the individuals composing it to be sincere Christians—suppose them to act upon their principles—suppose the foundations of morals laid firmly, selfishness subdued, public spirit diffused, personal and domestic and social virtues practised, the beneficial principles of Christianity carried out into act. Let all this go on. I ask what would, in the nature of things, be the consequence?¹²

Passions and selfishness being conquered, men would be placed in the stations for which from their talents they were really adapted. Party-spirit, faction, private ends, would be unknown. United wisdom would devise, and united strength execute, every national project. Instead of the injustice, the excess, the cruelty, the various crimes now prevalent among men, all would be equity, temperance, kindness, sympathy, peace. It is impossible to conceive of a nation in circumstances of such prosperity as this Christian spirit would disseminate. Liberty in its purest forms, commercial enterprise without hazardous speculation, prudence without covetousness, active zeal and exertion without contention, honour done to religion—love to his fellow-creatures animating each member of

¹² Butler, Wilberforce, A. Fuller.

the community—virtue embodied, or rather happiness itself, would be the result.

And what would be the relation of this state with others? United wisdom and united strength would put in fear the surrounding countries. Craft, ambition, private ends, covetousness, would have little force against such defences. Other nations would court the friendship, rely on the promises, engage in the projects of this unexampled and singular people. And how would discoveries be pushed all around; beneficial institutions formed; inventions in the arts communicated; religion diffused!

Suppose, then, that the whole world by degrees should become Christians, partly by the purifying of nominal Christian states, partly by the conversion of the nations, partly by the restoration of the Jews, partly by the overthrow of the Mahometan and Papal apostasies,—what would be the effect? There would be no idolatry and its abominations. There would be no profaning of the name of God, no perjury, no hypocrisy, no despising of those that are good, no arrogance, ingratitude, pride, self-complacency—no murmuring, sullenness nor suicide. There would be no wars, rivalships, antipathies, breaches of trust, strife, wrongs, slanders, litigations, deceit, murder. In short, there would be none of those streams of death, one or more of which now flow through every vein of society, and poison all its enjoyments. The result would be, that the world would become a scene of general peace and prosperity; and, abating the chances and calamities to which flesh is inseparably heir, would wear one unvaried face of complacency and joy.

So triumphant is the argument from the tendency of Christianity. Reason cannot be compared for a moment with Revelation—nor can virtue, nor natural religion. Good as these are,—strong as their bearings to overcome the opposing forces,—uniformly as they rise in proportion to the removal of impediments,

—still they never can bless fallen man. They are not adapted to his actual state. There is nothing to lead us to hope for the full triumph of reason or its kindred principles; and should they triumph, they would still leave man needy and miserable. But the prevalence of Christianity is the triumph of that vast scheme of mercy which the Almighty has revealed, to supply the darkness of reason, to enlarge and purify moral virtue, to define and establish and fill up natural religion. Christianity, indeed, is REASON PURIFIED—VIRTUE EXALTED AND RENDERED PRACTICAL.—NATURAL RELIGION SUSTAINED BY REDEMPTION. When Christianity triumphs, it is the victory of the highest reason, of the loftiest and most spiritual virtue, of essential and unmixed religion.

Accordingly we find that the tendency of Christianity towards the highest measure of human happiness, embraces all the proofs which establish the inferior principles, and adds many more of her own; rises upon the facts of all past experience, and includes a positive and continued exertion of the divine power.

The force of this entire argument may be better judged of, if we ask ourselves, what we should have said if Christianity had had a contrary tendency to that most beneficial one which we have demonstrated? What should we have said, if the strong and native bearings of the religion had been contrary to the temporal and spiritual welfare of individuals and nations?—But we need not make such a supposition. We have examples at hand. Let us look around, and we shall find that every scheme for guiding man in his moral and religious duties, except Christianity, has that actually pernicious tendency to which we have been alluding. Contrast the tendencies of the various offsprings of human weakness and folly, with the lovely and salutary working of Christianity. Contrast with Christianity mere human and external

restraints. Contrast with it a proud and false philosophy. Contrast with it a reliance on mere conscience and natural light. Contrast modern infidelity. Contrast the figments of the political economist, and the schemes of diffusing knowledge without religion. Contrast with it the absurd rules of the law of honour, of a mere respect to fame and human authority, of the notions of chivalry, as guides of life.

None of these put forth any distinct end bearing upon the happiness of man—none of these fulfil the conditions by which we demonstrate a tendency towards the highest welfare of mankind. None of these have any facts to produce: nor do they form any distinct religious doctrine professing to come from Almighty God for the benefit of man. Even reason, virtue, and natural religion, if separated from Christianity, or placed in opposition to it, lose most of their beneficial tendency, and utterly fail in their professed objects. They are at best only some perverted relics of the Revelation originally made, and now restored and enlarged, in the gospel.

So that, as we searched in vain, in our last Lecture, for the founder of a religion to compare with our divine Saviour, till we dragged Mahomet from his hiding-place to expose his vices and deformities, we now search in vain for a religion to contrast with Christianity in its tendencies upon human happiness, till we descend into the same gulf, and compel the false prophet again to submit to our examination the bearings and native force of his imposture. And what, I ask, are the tendencies of this corruption of the Christian doctrine, this supplemental revelation—for so it pretended to be—this **GROSS IMPOSTURE**, as it really is? Let Europe and Asia testify—let the ignorance, despotism, vice and misery of the nations subject to its iron sway, declare. I ask nothing about its proposing to itself the true end; I ask nothing about the facts of a beneficial nature which it can

produce. I pass by all our topics ; and I contrast the manifest mischievous tendency of the whole religion—of its want of adaptation to man—of the doctrines and precepts it enjoins—of the rites it introduces—of the character of its founder—of its sanguinary spirit ; of all the points, in short, to which we have had so frequently to allude—and I say that this deleterious poison is in direct opposition with the divine and healing tendency of the Christian faith.

But, in fact, it is only by concession that we speak at all of the pretensions of human folly. I feel almost a self-reproach in setting for a moment reason or natural light, or human philosophy, or infidelity, or Mahometanism, in contrast with the holy tendencies of Christianity. The inmost soul of man perceives the wide and immeasurable distance. The inmost soul of man feels that every one of these pretences carries its own condemnation in its mischievous operations. The inmost soul of man concludes that that religion cannot but be the true one, which wants only to be universally received, to remedy all the evils that fill the earth, and render men as much like holy and happy angels, as most of them are at present like deceitful, malignant, apostate spirits. The need in which the world stood of such a remedy, its evident tendency to promote in the highest degree the true welfare of men, and its actual efficacy as they rightly make use of it, proclaim its divinity in the most decisive manner, even apart from miracles, the fulfilment of prophecy, and all other external marks whatever.¹³

But I go too far in saying this. My argument requires a confirmation only, not a proof. The proper evidences of our religion have already been established. It is only as an additional and subsidiary argument, that I adduce the tendency of our holy faith. Yes, Christianity has the stamp of God upon it. Every

¹³ Scott.

Lecture upon its internal character, opens new fields of contemplation. and lays new grounds of confidence, as the constitution and frame-work of the religion is more and more developed.

But I pause. I leave the general subject. I entreat each one before me to apply it individually to his own heart. I appeal to every candid and serious mind. What is the tendency of the Christian religion? What is the incontrovertible force of the argument derived from it? What would it make you, your children, your family, if allowed its full power?

1. Let each one, then, ask himself, **WHAT IS THE TENDENCY OF MY CHRISTIANITY?** What is the influence and virtue which in my case it exerts? What force does my faith, my love, my obedience, put forth, to promote in the highest degree the temporal and spiritual welfare of those around me?

Let each one remember that the grand practical objection to Christianity is derived from **THE UNHOLY LIVES OF PROFESSED CHRISTIANS.** Men will not distinguish, as they ought, the bearings of a religion in itself and when duly received, from the lives and spirit of those who ever so slightly and imperfectly hold by it. The world looks to names rather than things; and seeing too many nominal believers as vain and treacherous, as cruel and proud, as dishonest and covetous, as profane and wicked, as others; they rashly conclude that all opinions are of secondary importance, that a man may believe what he likes, and that a moral life is all that the great Creator demands of him. Base and fatal inference! Let your lives, brethren, go to undeceive a misguided world. Show them the genuine tendencies of Christianity. Let them see in your spirit and temper the true effects of reliance upon Christ, of humility and self-denial, of subjection to the influences of the Holy Spirit, of separation from the love and the vain pursuits of the world, of good-will and forgiveness of injuries, of a

hope and expectation of heaven, of a zeal for the glory of Christ and the propagation of his gospel, of an habitual regard and preparation for eternity. Let them see Christianity embodied in its true virtue in your persons, in order that they may be led to a consideration of its nature and authority.

Let each one roll away the reproach falsely cast upon the Christian religion, so far as he is concerned. Let every one consider the honour of God as committed to his custody.

Open, then, your hearts, my friends, and especially my young friends, to receive the heavenly doctrine ! Welcome the gospel ! Let it have free course in you. Oppose not its mighty and sacred tendencies. Whatever obstacles to it exist in your principles, your habits, your pursuits, remove them out of the way. Take up the Holy Bible : let it work its work upon you. Remove the interposing hindrances ; God will effectually help those that call upon him.

2. And when Christianity has had its due operation upon your own hearts, one of the first effects will be, that **YOU WILL BE ANXIOUS TO SHOW ITS HOLY TENDENCY** in your family, in your neighbourhood. Strive to take away and lessen stumbling-blocks. Unite in those great religious institutions which cast a brilliant light over a nation, and shed their glory through the Heathen and Mahomedan countries. Never does the genuine bearing of Christianity appear more attractive, than in self-denying schemes of benevolent activity, which have no other object than the glory of God and the honour of religion and the good of souls. The working of such institutions upon the public opinion of a nation, the tendency they have to unite a people in the more ardent pursuit of personal piety, the sway they exercise over thousands who might never otherwise have attended to the gospel, the hope they furnish of a further revival of religion and of the divine blessing and favour upon govern-

ments, churches, nations,—render them amongst the most important and promising signs of the present times.

3. Finally, PRAY FOR THE COPIOUS INFLUENCES OF GRACE, and the co-operating aids of an almighty providence to hasten on the blessed period, foretold in the prophetic page, when THE TENDENCIES OF CHRISTIANITY SHALL BECOME EFFECTS; when the highest welfare and happiness of individuals and nations shall be actually accomplished. The ordinary assistances of the Holy Spirit are never wanting to the church. The innate power and virtue of Christianity depends on these assistances. All the bearing and struggling of doctrine and precepts and ministerial exhortation and example, and the labours of the spiritual church, would be in vain, without that animating power of the Spirit, which, like the principle of life in the works of nature, gives virtue and fruitfulness to the means employed. Christianity is never to be separated from the constant operation of its divine Author. But, besides these usual measures of grace, there have been, in various ages of the church, peculiar effusions of the influences of the Spirit; a general rekindling of the holy fire has taken place; ministers and people have been raised up to call a sleeping world to its true interests; Christianity has been vindicated from its false friends and its torpid and selfish adherents; its native doctrines have been asserted; the power of God has been humbly implored; the offices of parochial ministration have received a new impulse; the sacraments, the public prayers, the reading and preaching of God's word have been revived in their first freshness; souls have been converted in large numbers; bodies of spiritual and faithful believers have been raised up; the holy lives and active exertions of Christians have discovered fresh means for propagating the gospel; all has assumed a new appearance.

Such was the revival vouchsafed at the time of the blessed Reformation ; fresh showers of grace were granted in a copious measure, and half Europe awoke at the call of truth.

We need a similar gift of the divine mercy now to bring on the future glories of the church ; to give the operations of Christianity their full play ; to remove interposing obstacles ; to bind Satan, the great spiritual adversary, and turn the tendencies of our religion into ONE GRAND RESULT. All is moving towards this blessed end. Christianity has in itself all the innate causes of the salvation of the world ; the prophetic word encourages our hopes ; the close of the mystic period of the apostacies of the east and west approaches. " Lift up your heads," then, my Christian brethren, " for your redemption draweth nigh." All events in the world and in the church seem to conspire to this consummation. And, as the great principle of gravitation in the works of creation is drawing all matter towards the sun, the centre-object of the system, around which, so far as intervening obstacles allow, every thing is revolving ; whilst no part is unaffected with the secret bias impressed on universal nature by the hand of the Creator ; so is every thing gravitating, in the events of providence and the dealings of grace, towards the Sun of Righteousness, the great centre-object, around which all is moving, so far as interposing hindrances permit ; whilst nothing is exempt from the secret tendency impressed on things by the merciful will of our gracious God : nor will the operation cease till all revolve around the glorious source of light and salvation ; and, drawing warmth and life from his immediate beams, display, through eternity, his glory, as the only source of all their irradiation and all their joy.

LECTURE XIX.

THE TEST TO WHICH EVERY ONE MAY BRING
THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, BY
HUMBLY SUBMITTING TO ITS DIRECTIONS, AND
MAKING A TRIAL FOR HIMSELF OF ITS PRO-
MISED BLESSINGS.

1 JOHN v. 10.

*He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness
in himself.*

It may naturally be asked, after all we have said in our former Lectures on the divine excellency and holy effects of the Christian doctrine, whether there is any way in which a sincere inquirer may bring to the test of his own observation the truth of some of these statements—whether he cannot rise above a mere conviction of truth, to an experience and perception of the blessings proffered by Christianity.

To this question we answer, that he may, and that the design of these Lectures is in a great measure lost, unless he actually receive for himself the heavenly benefit, and possess in his own breast the most forcible of all evidences, that arising from the inward power and truth of religion in fulfilling its promises.

For we hesitate not to assert, that the internal perception of the blessings of Revelation, is the most satisfactory of all reasons to the mind of the sincere believer, and is capable of being so certified by numerous and undoubted testimonies to others, as to invite them to make a similar experiment, and seek for and obtain the like conviction.

To this division of our subject we approach as by far the most important, practically speaking, of all that we have treated, because it brings us directly to the END of the Revelation, the salvation of our souls.

And may it please God by his Holy Spirit so to assist us in opening this great topic, that it may conduce to the glory of his holy name and the establishment of our faith in the divine authority of his gospel!

Let us then in the present Lecture state THE NATURE of this argument—ITS AUTHORITY from holy Scripture—THE FACTS by which it is sustained, and the SINGULAR IMPORTANCE of the proof deduced. In the following Lecture, we shall proceed to offer some DIRECTIONS to those who are desirous of entering upon the inquiry.

I. We first consider the NATURE OF THE ARGUMENT. I address the young, the uninformed, the inquiring, the serious; and I say that as Christianity is in so many parts of it a practical thing—a remedy to be applied to our moral maladies—of course it is capable, in these respects, of being known, just as any other practical matter may be known.

For what is Christianity? Is it a revelation of abstract truths? Is it a theorem of mathematical science? Is it a discovery in any of the branches of metaphysics? If it were, there could then, indeed, be no internal test of its benefits. But Christianity is none of these things. Nor is it a mere system of

speculative opinions about religion, like those of the different sects of philosophers. If it were, it would then also admit of no practical experiment—we might grow old, as they did, in disputation; and at last lie down to die in uncertainty.

Nor, again, is it merely a pure code of morality, with certain doctrines attached to it. In this case likewise, an appeal to an inward observation of its excellency in the heart might be out of the question. The morality might be common, or nearly so, to many who reject, as well as to those who receive, the religion. Accordingly, those who consider Christianity as chiefly a code of morals, overlook or despise this argument from experience.

Or, again, if the effects of Christianity were to take place exclusively in a future state, and did not touch on any of the intervening circumstances of man, we could not, in this life, have that personal conviction of which we are about to treat.

But if Christianity be, as it is, an actual deliverance of man from the greatest moral evils—if it be a deliverance from ignorance, the slavery of sin, the bondage of disordered appetite, the alienation of the heart from God, the guilt and terror of an accusing conscience, and the fearful apprehensions of death and eternal judgment—if Christianity illuminate the understanding, renew the affections, bestow the joy of pardon and acceptance with God, enkindle an ardent desire after holiness, and raise up the soul to the love of Christ—if Christianity inspire a delight in spiritual things, a superiority to this world, an anticipation of the glories of another—if, further, Christianity reveal a divine Saviour and a sanctifying Spirit as the objects of trust, reliance, expectation—if, as a consequence of all this, Christianity carry on its front a promise of the grace of the Holy Spirit to them that sue for it—if it declare that God will hear the prayers and satisfy the desires of them that seek him—if it promise to

calm the conscience, to sustain the heart under affliction, to strengthen with internal might the fainting spirit, and heal all the diseases and sicknesses of the soul;—if all this, and much more, be actually promised by Christianity, then of course something of it will be known and observed in our own hearts, in proportion as we obey the gospel—then something of this divine glory and efficacy of truth will be perceived and felt, not surely by those who do not, but by those who do, make a trial for themselves, and bring to the test of experience this part of the pretensions of Revelation.

And an argument drawn from such experience is by no means in contradiction to the external or internal proofs of Christianity, but in addition to them; something which goes further; something which confirms them; something of a different and much higher kind, increasing the persuasion of the truth to those who are in possession of other arguments, and supplying their place to those who are not. The evidences of Christianity are one thing; the experience and trial of its blessings are another. Nothing, indeed, but the extraordinary perversion of human nature could make this matter at all questionable,

How do men act in other practical cases? A celebrated preservative against poisons, Mithridate, is still in use. It is said to have taken its name from its inventor, the king of Pontus, whose history is known in the records of ancient Rome.¹ The medicine is common in many parts of the civilized world. The receipt is said to have been found in the cabinet of Mithridates, written with his own hand, and to have been carried to Rome by Pompey. It was translated into verse by a famous physician, named Damocrates, and hence called *Confectio Damocratis*; and was afterwards

¹ He died about sixty-four years before the Christian æra.

translated by Galen,² from whom it has come down to our days.³

Now it is clearly one thing for a critic to arrange the external and internal evidences of this preparation, to vindicate the claims of its inventor, to trace its transmission from one age to another, to discuss the various elements of which it is composed, (it consists of a great variety of drugs,) and to reply to the objections which might be raised upon all these points: and it is quite another thing for a sick person to make a trial himself of its efficacy, by applying it as a remedy in his own case.

Such is the difference between the external evidences of Christianity, and the actual trial of its virtues, to which I am now inviting the sincere inquirer.

Or, to take another example, about two centuries since, the Jesuits in Peru are said to have cured the Countess del Cinchon, the lady of a Spanish Viceroy, of a dangerous fever, by means of the medicinal preparation now known by the name of Peruvian bark, the use of which had long been familiar to the inhabitants of the American continent. This first brought the celebrated medicine (cinchona is the technical name) into reputation. A Jesuit, in the year 1649, imported a considerable quantity of it into Italy, which was distributed by the fathers of that order. Its fame spread. It long remained a lucrative article of commerce to the Jesuits. It encountered considerable opposition at first from the regular practitioners of medicine. It conquered all resistance. Its use has extended and its reputation has been increasing to the present day; so that it is now univer-

² Who died about A. D. 201.

³ Chambers in A. Fuller; Rees; the *Pantologia* in voce *Mithridatium*.

sally esteemed as one of the most safe and powerful remedies in various classes of diseases.⁴

Now a modern reasoner might take it into his head to object to the authenticity of this origin of the medicine ; he might allege that the preparation, as it is vended in Europe, had passed through so many hands before it reached his, and that there was so much uncertainty about it, that no dependance could be placed upon it, and that it had better be rejected altogether from the list of remedies. But of what account would such objections be in the estimation of him who could reply, " I have tried the bark, I have found it to be effectual, and that under a disease which threatened my life, and when all other means failed. I know nothing of the historical objections, nor the answers to them ; this I know, I was near to death—I took the medicine—it restored me to health and comfort."

Such is the nature of the argument, so far as any illustrations can explain it ; for the historical evidences of Christianity, the miraculous attestations to it, its supernatural propagation, and internal excellency, are inconceivably superior to any thing that can occur as to the tradition of human medicines. In like manner, then, we appeal to facts and experience in the case before us. We assert that Christianity is the medicine of the mind ; we assert that the disease for which it is a specific is sin and its consequences, spiritual death ; we assert that the effects of this divine remedy are the recovery of spiritual health, pardon, and holiness ; we assert that the validity of these effects is established by universal experience ; we assert that this is a test to which every one may bring the truth of this part of the revealed doctrine ; we assert that this inward witness, while it is an indirect evidence to others, is a most positive and conclusive one to the Christian's own heart, an evidence which supersedes

⁴ Rees, and Pantalogia—sub voc. Cinchona.

all long chains of argument, and speaks by its intrinsic virtue.

Let us pass on to consider—

II. THE SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY ON WHICH THIS ARGUMENT RESTS.

For having established the truth of Christianity by its proper external evidences, and these evidences being supposed to be known, our concern in all these lectures on the internal and subsidiary proofs, is to trace out what the Bible itself declares of the nature of the Revelation, and thus to show the excellency of its discoveries, and their bearings upon man.

1. What, then, do OUR LORD AND HIS APOSTLES declare on this subject? Do they propose any thing in a way of trial or inward witness of the truth of Christianity? Undoubtedly they do. At the very entrance on the heavenly way, this promise stands prominent, "Ask, and it shall be given you: if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!"⁵ Then if any one asks and receives, he has a proof, in his own case, that Christianity is so far true. So when our Lord says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;"⁶ he submits, as it were, the truth of his religion to this criterion. The apostle Paul does the same, when he declares the excellency and glory of the Christian doctrine, and that the perception of that excellency by his converts distinguishes them from those whose eyes Satan, the great adversary, has blinded.—"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ;"—so that the rising of

⁵ Luke xi. 9—11.

⁶ John vii. 17.

the natural sun after a dark night, is not more perceptible than the shining of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, into the mind.—“If,” therefore, “our gospel be hid,” the apostle argues, “it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”⁷

2. But, in the next place, remark that **THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE**, in the Old Testament as well as the New, it is asserted that there is an actual observation of certain effects upon the hearts of those who seek after truth, to which others are strangers. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.”⁸ “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.”⁹ “The entrance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple.”¹⁰ “The statutes of the Lord are more to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”¹¹ “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”¹² “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”¹³

What is the import of these and similar passages? Do they not proceed on the supposition that Revelation communicates spiritual blessings, spiritual perceptions of excellency—something that resembles light, something that is sweet as honey to the taste, something that guides and teaches man, and shows him the divine covenant? And are not these things promised to those that fear God, to the meek and lowly; that is, to all the real disciples of the religion? And are not these things promised as a test, which all are invited to make; which the wicked neither understand

⁷ 2 Cor. iv. 3—6.

⁹ Psalm xxv. 9.

¹¹ Psalm xix. 10, 11

⁸ Psalm xxv. 14.

¹⁰ Psalm xcix. 130.

¹² Psalm lxvi. 16.

¹³ Psalm xxxiv. 8.

nor seek after; but which is consigned as a secret to those who fear God?

3. But observe, further, **THE APPEALS WHICH THE APOSTLES CONTINUALLY MAKE TO THEIR CONVERTS**, as to their experience of the effects which Christianity had produced upon them; notice how they speak, not only of miraculous gifts communicated, but a moral change produced, spiritual blessings and joys perceived, a transition mighty as from death to life, experienced; and these appeals occur with frequency and familiarity, quite as things known and indisputable.

“You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”¹⁴ “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”¹⁵ “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.”¹⁶ “Such were some of you, (adulterers, thieves, covetous, &c.) but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”¹⁷ “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”¹⁸ Mighty changes these; but consisting of a divine and spiritual transformation, supposed to be known and felt by the converts.

4. Further, the **NECESSITY OF AN EXPERIENCE AND INWARD PERCEPTION OF RELIGION IS EXPRESSLY INSISTED ON**. “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may **PROVE**” (experience, practically bring to the test) “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”¹⁹—Again, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory

¹⁴ Eph. ii. 1.

¹⁵ Col. i. 13.

¹⁶ Eph. v. 8.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

¹⁸ Eph. ii. 10.

¹⁹ Rom. xii. 2.

in tribulations also ; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience EXPERIENCE, and EXPERIENCE hope."²⁰—Once more, " And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all JUDGMENT,"²¹ (*αἰσθησεῖ*, perception, experience.)—Further, " As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have TASTED that the Lord is gracious."²²

5. Moreover, THIS TESTIMONY IS BROADLY ASSERTED TO BELONG TO EVERY ONE THAT RECEIVES THE GOSPEL. " He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."²³ " The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God."²⁴ " If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."²⁵

6. In fact, the whole END OF CHRISTIANITY IS TO PRODUCE this divine and moral transformation, this secret and internal obedience to the truth, to be proved by its appropriate fruits in the life and conduct. Other parts of the evidences of Christianity lead to this end, but this part is the end itself. Christianity never was intended for speculation or disputation, but for practical use. It is for this purpose only that it touches on high and mysterious points. It makes eternity act upon time. It shakes one world by the terrors of another. Where this efficacy is not felt, the Revelation fails of its object ; where it is, Christianity has so far achieved its purpose, and goes on to build up the convert in his most holy faith.

7. Accordingly, this PERSONAL RECEPTION OF THE DIVINE GRACE IS THE PECULIAR TESTIMONY which goes along with the gospel in the ordinary state of the church. It attended it even when the miraculous powers and the prophetic inspiration first surrounded the infant cause of truth. But the Holy Ghost producing these transforming effects, is the

²⁰ Rom. v. 1—5.²¹ Phil. i. 9, 10.²² 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.²³ 1 John v. 10.²⁴ Rom. viii. 16.²⁵ Rom. viii. 9.

main and continued witness for Christ from age to age. "Therefore ungodly persons," says a celebrated divine, "have a great disadvantage in handling this subject of the evidences of Christianity; because, holding by the religion only by external proofs, they do not reach the most persuasive evidence of her truth. For the spirit of renovation, sanctification, and illumination, assimilating the soul to Christ and heaven, is the continued witness to Christianity to all true believers, even as the rational soul of a child is the inherent witness or evidence that he is born of rational parents."²⁶

But the case is too plain to every pious mind to warrant so much detail. However, as those for whom I am now most concerned, and to whose apprehensions I am anxious to bring down this grand practical argument, the nature and scriptural authority for which I have been establishing, cannot be too strongly pressed on such a point, let us consider, as we proposed—

III. THE FACTS BY WHICH THIS ARGUMENT IS SUSTAINED. .

How stands the case as a matter of fact? What do men most competent to speak declare? Do they testify, or do they not, that they find this inward witness to the truth of Christianity? What are the phenomena in real life?

In appealing to this criterion, we have a great advantage in the present day. It has long been agreed on all hands, that in practical questions matters of fact are to be mainly attended to. The whole philosophy of Bacon, Newton, and their illustrious followers, rests on this one principle, that nature is to be traced out, investigated, cautiously followed; that we know nothing but as fact and observation demon-

strate things ; that hypothesis and theory and objections are of no force against undoubted experiment, from which alone we are to infer, by cautious induction, the general laws of nature. It is the same, so far as the case will allow, in the philosophy of mind ; the phenomena only are attended to. The intellectual and active powers, their relations, their objects, the laws by which they operate, are to be deduced from experiments carefully conducted, reported with fidelity, compared with each other in a sufficient variety of cases, and distinguished from hasty, partial, inconclusive observations, by their proper effects. Hypothesis, opinion, abstract reasonings, are of no avail against well-established phenomena.

On these principles of common sense we are acting every day. Are the objects of our inquiry things without us ?—we judge by the sensible phenomena, by the tangible results of external experience. Are the objects of inquiry things within us ?—we judge by internal observation, by inward consciousness, by what passes in the interior theatre of the mind, attested by its proper fruits. In each case we accumulate experiments, and conclude only after a sufficient number of clear and well-attested trials has united in bringing out the same results.

All our knowledge comes originally from these two sources—the examination of things without us, by the medium of the senses ; and the examination of things within us, by internal consciousness, and their effects on the temper and conduct : the first is sensible observation, the second is internal observation ; the first we call physics, the second the science of the mind—and in both if we cannot make the necessary experiments ourselves, we take them upon credible testimony.

How, then, stand the facts as to this inward witness to Christianity ; which is of course a spiritual and interior process, taking place in the receptacle of the

human heart? What are the internal observations? What the phenomena? What the correspondent effects?

1. There are, then, THOUSANDS AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF WITNESSES, in various ages, from the first dawn of Revelation after the fall of Adam, to the present moment, who humbly but firmly testify that the peculiar effects of the divine grace, as stated in the Holy Scriptures, have been produced in them; that they have tried, and that their trial was successful; that they have made the experiment of the divine promises of illumination, pardon, strength, consolation, and have found those promises verified.

More especially, since the promulgation of the glorious gospel, and the larger effusion of the grace of the Holy Spirit, there is a cloud of witnesses of all ranks, all ages, all casts of character, all previous habits, who declare that they have put the truth of Christianity to the test of experiment, and have found that the peculiar effects, stated in the New Testament to be inseparable concomitants of a lively faith in Christ, have been produced in them.

Let us examine any number of these facts. Begin where you please. Take the first age after the apostolic. What do Clemens Romanus, Polycarp, Irenæus, Justin Martyr, tell us in every page of their writings? Do they not assert that they found a divine excellency and glory in Christianity, and especially in the doctrine of the person and work of Christ? Do they not assert that Christianity changed their whole character, and produced the very same effects, and gave the very same inward experience and consolation of which the apostolic converts partook?

Go to the series of succeeding ages. Read the Fathers. See what Cyprian, and Chrysostom, and Ambrose, and St. Austin, and Claudius of Turin, and Anselm, and Bernard, testify as to the experiment they made of Christianity. Is not the love of Christ,

which inflamed their hearts, the grand excellency and the redeeming quality of their writings; that which remains as the uniform result, after all the passing controversies, errors on many incidental points, and superstitions and false devotions are deducted? There is nothing, perhaps, in modern divinity to be compared with the confessions of St. Austin, as a testimony to the reality of experimental Christianity.

And what did the great leaders at the period of the blessed Reformation say? What are the facts in the case of Luther and Melancthon, Zuingle and Ecolampadius, Cranmer and Latimer and Ridley? Did they not find the same experiments issue in the self-same results? Were not the phenomena precisely similar?

Ask the thousands and hundreds of thousands of pious Christians in the present day. They make the same reply. They declare with one mouth, that they have found all the promised blessings of Christianity realised, all the concomitants of a lively faith produced, all the peculiar testimony of grace in the heart and conscience afforded.

In a word, the discoveries made by the light of Scripture; the promises fulfilled, especially that of the Holy Spirit; the prayers answered; the abiding effects produced on the judgment, affections, habits, and conduct; the comfort derived from the communion of the soul with Christ; the superiority and conquest obtained over the world and its allurements;²⁷ the hope of heaven, which gilds the moments of sorrow and cheers under the approach of death: these are the solid, clear facts of the case, taking place in the interior receptacle of the heart, and attested to others by the proper credentials of numerous, calm, undeviating fruits. These constitute a body of phenomena which any one may put, in his own case,

to the test of experiment, and on which the most secure inductive proof may be built.

2. For it is to be observed, that there is **AN IDENTITY** in the result of all these experiments which affords the utmost safety to those who reason from them; just as the identity of physical facts, or of phenomena in the operations of mind, guard the philosopher from practical errors in science.

We allow that the utmost caution is required in this case, because the operations are internal, seated in the conscience, not subjected to the perception of the senses, not capable of being projected and thrown out. But then they are not the less real, when ascertained by a comparison of a sufficient number of well-attested cases. We separate and lay out of the question all doubtful phenomena, as the natural philosopher puts aside doubtful facts. We take away also, as he does, all that may be produced by other causes. We then reduce, after his example, all the experiments to that which agrees in each. We go with him to the appropriate and discriminating marks of the specific effects to be ascertained. We likewise proceed cautiously in collecting our facts and inferring any general laws. And then we assert that there is an identity, a peculiarity, an uniform and grand and perceptible effect on the heart of man, produced by the Christian doctrine, and by the Christian doctrine only, which may be established in proof, which is found no where else but in true Christians, which is found always in them, and which is wholly distinct from a mere moral conviction of the truth of Christianity and a mere formal admission of its creed.

3. We assert, moreover, that these phenomena are **IN AGREEMENT WITH THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD**, and exactly what that word declares shall take place in all who become its disciples. This is a confirmation which **the** philosopher does not possess. He has no

divine system of the creation, attested by external proofs, to which he can refer his individual experiments and check his conclusions. The Christian philosopher has.

4. Then we produce multitudes who can trace out, in themselves and others, SOME OF THE MAIN STEPS OF THE PROCESS of this experience—just as the naturalist can sometimes follow the successive changes in the progress of his experiments. Many Christians can well remember the time when every thing was contrary in them to what it now is—when they disliked and disrelished spiritual things; when they supremely loved the world; when they had no hatred of sin or humiliation on account of it; when they were so far from perceiving an excellency or glory in the doctrine of Christ, that they despised and contemned it; when they were so far from knowing any thing of the experience of the divine grace, that they did not believe there was such a thing; when they were so far from loving true Christians because they bore the image of Christ, that they hated and avoided them in proportion as they bore that image.

But they were led to inquire—they were led to seek humbly into the truth of the Christian doctrine; and they became themselves step by step the witnesses of its grace.

Nor in their own cases only; they have been able, as ministers and parents and friends, to trace the process of this experiment in those committed to their care; whose spirit, affections, and conduct, they have daily had the opportunity of watching; and in whose cases they have discerned with joy the life and feelings of true Christianity gradually appearing.

Not that the process can be traced in all instances. The improvement may be, and frequently is, imperceptible under the means of instruction, the sacraments, education, the example of friends, the public ministry of the word, the discipline of affliction, the

perusal of awakening treatises. But the grand result—the identity of effect, is the same in all.

5. But we go further. We state that though this experience of religion is, from the nature of the case, chiefly hidden in the secret of the breast—to be known only to the possessor and to be attested to others by his consistent declarations—yet there are CERTAIN FRUITS AND CONSEQUENCES APPEARING OUTWARDLY IN THE CONDUCT, which are the peculiar and inseparable evidences of these internal feelings, and lie open to the observation of mankind. We appeal constantly to the holy, benevolent, useful lives of all who claim aright this inward witness of Christianity, which we constantly require as the appropriate testimony of their sincerity. We thus discern the hypocrite, the enthusiast, the mere partisan, the false religionist. If men profess to have the internal experience of Christianity, we ask for the proof; and it is only as their consistent, self-denying, blameless, and upright conduct, supports their profession, that we credit their statements. These are visible and tangible evidences. These distinguish the gem from the counterfeit. These are the king's mark, so to speak, upon the coin. Men who thus act, ought, and must, and ever will be believed, when they assert that they have those internal feelings which are described in Scripture as flowing from Christianity, and which they affirm to be the source whence their conduct springs.

Such then are the facts on which our argument rests. And here we pause to offer two remarks on these phenomena and experiments as to real Christianity.

What, we ask, is there in these internal perceptions of life, consolation, and strength, derived from the doctrines of Christianity, which should EXCITE OUR ASTONISHMENT? Would not the wonder be, if there

were no such feelings, no such inward witness to the soul? What! are there excellencies in human knowledge, and shall there be none in divine? What! is an intelligent, well-educated man allowed to have powers of expression and means of exciting our surprise and pleasure beyond those of a child, and shall not the language of apostles and prophets, and the discoveries concerning God and the soul and eternity, be admitted to awaken emotions beyond the mere trifles of human knowledge and instruction? What! are men of uncommon endowments, as Bacon, Pascal, Newton, allowed to rise above those of ordinary talents, and are they expected to take wider views and make more important communications, and excite warmer feelings of wonder, admiration, gratitude; and shall not the great and infinite God be allowed to surpass all the petty communications of man, in the mysteries of his will, in the importance of his commands, in the depths of his mercy; and in the correspondent emotions of fear, love, faith, hope, grateful joy, affiance, awakened in the heart? What! do we allow that in the displays of glory and beauty in the works of creation, the natural perfections of God may be contemplated and known, and become to the pious and duly prepared mind the sources of internal peace, thanksgiving, prayer, admiration, obedience, resignation; and shall we not admit, that men may perceive the moral perfections of God in the gospel?—Shall all his mercy and wisdom and infinite contrivance in redemption, have no effect upon the soul?—Shall the stupendous fact of the incarnation be received with a tame indifference? What! do men allow that tidings of joy and deliverance in human things should call up proportionate affections; and that he would be thought a monster of ingratitude, who should receive with apathy the news of an immense act of royal clemency extended to him when condemned to death;

and shall we not allow that the glorious and unexpected tidings of redemption from eternal death should awaken all the gratitude of the soul? Shall not pardon and life and adoption and the hope of heaven, overwhelm the heart with some correspondent perceptions and emotions?

Yes, it is most reasonable, that if there be such a thing as a Revelation from the great God, comprising such amazing discoveries as the gospel, affecting such all-important interests, promising such mighty aids of the Holy Spirit, laying down such grounds of faith and love and hope in Christ Jesus, delivering man from such complicated misery, and exalting him to such heights of holy peace and joy—it is most reasonable, that there should be such a thing as perceiving the excellency and glory of it, as feeling its efficacy, as having an inward witness of its fulfilment and operations in our own breasts. There is nothing to astonish us in such effects—the matter of astonishment would be, if Christianity did not assert, and Christians did not experience, them.

But we remark, also, that it is NO ARGUMENT THAT THESE THINGS CANNOT BE, BECAUSE SOME HAVE NEVER FELT THEM. Nothing upon earth can be more unreasonable than to make my experience the standard of all that has occurred, or can occur to others, on such a subject as practical religion. No doubt, multitudes, who profess Christianity and pass as Christians, have never experienced these peculiar effects of the gospel, just as there are multitudes who call themselves admirers of the works of nature, who have never made the experiments, nor gone through the investigations, which the philosopher has done. They may be discerning men in other matters; but they are no judges of a philosophical question, nor can they ever become such, unless they will either

receive the facts of the case upon credible testimony, or go through the course of experiments for themselves.

An astonishing result in chemistry is reported to me. I know nothing of chemistry—I have not read much on the subject—the facts strike me as incredible—I neither examine the writings of the great chemists of the day, and receive their united and well-ascertained testimony; nor do I enter on the business of the laboratory myself—or, if I do, it is without preparation or any knowledge of the elements of the science, and I fail; and yet I refuse to believe the facts, and calumniate and despise those who do, however carefully they have examined and verified them.

Such is the unreasonable conduct of those who reject the doctrine of the inward witness of Christianity, because they have never felt it themselves. The truth is, they may never have been in a situation to judge of it. They may never have had any religious earnestness; have never applied their minds to the gospel; have never searched the contents of the Revelation. They rashly conclude, indeed, that what they do not themselves perceive and feel, no one else perceives and feels; that what they have never experienced, is not necessary, not important, not reasonable. And yet what proof is this that other men, with another preparation of mind, and other previous tastes, and a different way of going about things, may not discover that inward excellency, and feel those sacred comforts which these men condemn? If there be a book of God, we may well suppose that the distinguishing glories of its discoveries would be of such a kind as that the corruption and self-confidence of the human heart would be incapable of perceiving them.²⁸ “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he

²⁸ J. Edwards,—to whom this Lecture is throughout greatly indebted.

know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”²⁹ There must be the faculty, as well as the object. The natural man must be taught to renounce his false wisdom, his alienation from God, his pride, and self-consequence, and he must enter the kingdom of heaven as a little child, or he never will receive those distinguishing truths, nor feel those peculiar blessings, which are spiritually discerned. The conclusions of such a person against the experience of religion, are like the conclusions of a blind man against the beauties of the heavens, or the glories of the rainbow ; they are prejudices, not reasons ; and they leave our grand position in all its incontrovertible force,—that there is an inward testimony to Christianity, which is supported by the authority of sacred Scripture, confirmed by innumerable witnesses, and lying open to the examination of every humble student ; by which the excellency and force of the Christian doctrine may be known from its holy consolations in the heart, in addition to the conviction produced by mere arguments, or the dictates of natural conscience.

But we pass on to consider,

IV. THE SINGULAR IMPORTANCE OF THE PROOF THUS EDUCED.

1. It is the only proof that is ENTIRELY LEVEL to the vast mass of mankind. The other proofs, indeed, are, in a certain degree, level to the common sense of man. The case made out, from the miracles, the prophecies, &c. is such as strikes, upon the whole, the conscience. But then it is impossible for the great body of persons to understand fully and adequately the grounds on which the case rests. They take the facts, as it is quite reasonable they should take them, and as they take the facts in medicine, jurisprudence, public statutes, &c. upon what they are told is the

²⁹ 1 Cor. xi. 14.

concurrent testimony of a vast number of men in different ages and nations, who are known to be competent for deciding.

With regard to the internal evidence, the bulk of mankind are far better capable of judging for themselves, than in the case of the external. The morals especially, and the example of our Lord, are level to every capacity in their chief features; at the same time, as they stand connected with the history of Christianity and its doctrines, they involve matter requiring considerable reflection, and much thought.

But the argument from experience has that sort of force, which strikes an unlettered and plain mind at once. Unless men can come to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel by its own intrinsic light and excellency, and its holy effects upon them, it is impossible for them to have any thorough and adequate conviction at all. Except the arguments from the morals and the example of Christ, (which may be considered as a part of this, in which it centres, and comes to its rest,) they cannot have a clear and satisfying conviction. They may see, indeed, a great probability; it may be reasonable for them to give credit to what learned men tell them, (and under the circumstances it is most reasonable;) but to have a conviction so strong and intimate as to carry them through all duties and trials; and lead them to part with all for Christ, the evidence they can derive from history will not suffice. Those who have not somewhat of a general view of the series of historical events in the world, and of the state of mankind from age to age, cannot see for themselves the clear evidence, from history, of the truth of facts in distant ages. All is confused, indistinct, doubtful to their view.

But the gospel was not given for the learned only, or principally, but for the poor—for the great body of men. There are ninety-nine out of every hundred of those for whom the sacred Scriptures were written,

who are not capable of any certain or effectual conviction of their divine authority by such arguments as learned men employ. If men, brought up in heathenism, must wait for a certain conviction of Christianity till they have learning and acquaintance with the history of politer nations, so as to see clearly the force of such kind of arguments, it would make the evidence of the gospel cumbersome, and its propagation among them infinitely difficult.³⁰

Now it has pleased God to give an evidence beyond mere probability—some higher persuasion than any from history or human tradition. A view of the divine glory in the gospel, and a perception of its efficacy in their hearts, convince them of its divine character at once. He that truly sees the transcendent, supreme glory of these things, and feels their healing virtue, and has obtained life and salvation by them, knows, as it were, their divine origin by intuition; he not only argues, but sees, they are divine. Not that the soul judges the doctrines of Christianity to be from God, without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without any long chain of argument; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel by but one step—its divine glory and fulfilment in itself of all its promises.

It is this experience which supported the martyrs and confessors (many of whom were women and illiterate persons;) it is this which, in fact, sustains the faith of the mass of our Christian population.

The number of those who can argue and reason, and weigh historical proofs, is very few. The number of those who can feel the power of the gospel, and discern its glory, is vast as the human race.

Merely literary men are slow to admit that vulgar minds can have any rational perception of truths in-

³⁰ J. Edwards.

volving great and high contemplations. They overlook the distinction between the nice analysis of principles, the accurate statement of definitions, logical inferences, and the solution of difficulties; and THE STRUCTURE OF OUR OWN THOUGHTS, AND THE PLAY OF THE AFFECTIONS. They discern not between the theory of metaphysical science, and the first truths and rational instincts which are implanted in the breasts of all—and which prepare them to see the glory of the gospel, to feel its influence, and to argue from both for the divinity of Christianity. The one is an elevating employment of the intellect; the other the germs and seeds of all intellectual and moral knowledge, which lie dormant till they are called forth by occasions, and then they burst into life and power.³¹

The conviction, then, built upon the perception of a divine virtue and glory in Christianity, is an inward witness, most rational in itself, although entirely level to the whole body of mankind.

2. But this evidence is THE MOST SATISFACTORY that can be adduced to men of all classes and degrees of learning. For to feel the healing power of the gospel; to admire its immense glory; to know its inward efficacy; to find that it raises us towards God; to be persuaded that it brings us into communication with the Father of Spirits; to know that it places us in unison and harmony with the will of the supreme Arbiter; to be conscious of elevation, of happiness, of hope, which go on towards heaven, and attract us thither,—all this is a sort of evidence so different from mere logical proof—so far higher than mere conclusions of reason, that it places man on another footing, and lands him in another region. The persuasion from historical and internal evidence produces an human faith; silences objections from without; proves

³¹ Verplank.

negatively that man could not have invented the gospel ; establishes the abstract excellency of its doctrines, precepts, founder, and tendency. But these conclusions are cold, timid, uninfluential, till the heart is warmed and touched with the love of God ; till the inward testimony of the gospel, from its surprising glory and blessed effects upon the whole character, is added to all the others. Then the mind is inflamed—then all the preceding classes of evidence kindle into life—then the soul of man reposes in satisfaction ; it feels it has attained to truth, has secured the treasure, found the Pearl of great price, reached the highest good and proper blessedness of man.

And what has learning to say to all this ? What can mere talents for research, or depth of genius, or powers of eloquence, say to an evidence which pardons, and sanctifies, and saves ? I may be silenced by all these human reasonings ; I am made happy and holy by the inward resources of Christianity.

Accordingly, there is no time when this inward testimony is not the most satisfactory, from its very nature, to the heart of man ; whilst there are times of peculiar temptation, when no other can afford relief. No minds are so open to the incursion of doubt, as the most powerful and argumentative : no minds are so open to the fiery darts of the great adversary ; none so prone to an infirm and wavering faith. In these respects, the moral and internal witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart, is a refuge and consolation. It shuts out doubts ; it silences cavils ; it overrules objections ; it quells speculative difficulties.

To be conscious of the divine glory of the things revealed ; to feel their elevating, purifying, consoling effects ; to know they have made me a better man ; to recollect that answers to prayer, and fulfilment of promises, have been and are testifying of the truth of Christianity to the heart—these are solid proofs, which silence the floating conjectures and momentary hesi-

tations which temptations may inject into the mind. The soul has an anchor, a hold, an interior conviction of Christianity, which nothing can shake. It is not this or that particular argument merely, that sustains our faith ; it is the great substance of the gospel, producing holy and heavenly effects upon the heart and character.

3. But this is also A GROWING, GERMINATING evidence ; ever new, ever at hand, ever reviving. It advances with our knowledge of God, our love to our Saviour, our victory over sin, our fervency in prayer, our spiritual tastes, habits, and joys. Our evidences will, from the nature of things, decline in vividness. Our perception of them becomes faint. The mind cannot be roused at once to the consideration of them. We are obliged, on all the less obvious points, to rely on what I may call past evidence ; a recollection that we have once examined the subject to the bottom, and then attained the most complete conviction of its truth, though the particulars are no longer present with the mind. But this inward testimony is always at hand, always refreshing ; it is entwined about our associations and habits of thought ; it is inseparable from our religious feelings ; it is springing up with all our holiest desires, prayers, aspirations. The young penitent has some measure of this interior proof, in the purifying and consoling power of Christianity upon his heart. But every year he lives, his persuasion becomes deeper with his deeper experience, his new observations upon the glory of the religion, his growing acquaintance with its promises, his increasing recollections of answers to his prayers. This inward experience is an accompanying stream of grace and consolation, with all the freshness of its first rise upon it, and yet all the depth and volume of its accumulated progress. It is like a river of life flowing with us through the world. It is an exhaustless spring which strengthens and widens as we advance towards

the borders of that eternal state whither we are going.

4. Not that we are to disparage the other branches of evidence, because we assign to this a province in some respects higher. On the contrary, by this inward testimony, we STRENGTHEN ALL THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PROOFS, where we are in circumstances to study them, and prepare the mind for judging of them aright. Those documents and deeds of our inheritance remain as they were, in the hands of all who are competent to examine them. There they are, the external bulwarks and defence of our religion. We desert not one part of the fortification. There stand the miracles and prophecies. There remains the miraculous propagation. There are the obvious good effects which Christianity has produced. There also stand the internal evidences—the adaptation—the sublimity of the doctrines—the morals—the character of Christ—the beneficial tendency. All these remain in their original strength.

But this inward conviction of the excellency of the discoveries of Revelation by their own light, and of the healing grace of it communicated to the heart, adds incomparable force to the result, pushes the demonstration to its highest point—and that point, such as to appropriate all the blessings to man, to bring him to his true end, and accomplish that for which all the other proofs were preparatory.

And thus the mind is assisted in judging of the external proofs. As a man who, from blindness, or the darkness of a cavern, should first behold the sun, would have a reflex light thrown upon the evidences by which he had previously credited its existence; so he who beholds the Sun of righteousness, and the glory of the divine Saviour, from a previous state of moral blindness and unbelief, will have a reflex light cast upon all the external evidences by which he credited the truths of Christianity.

This inward obedience to religion, also, removes all that prejudice and obscurity of the heart, by which the force even of external proof is much weakened. It makes the mind from unwilling, willing; from prejudiced, unprejudiced; from dull and heavy and reluctant, ready and prompt; from uninterested and indifferent, lively and eager and impressed. It assists and engages the attention; it helps the reasoning powers; it makes even the speculative notions more vivid.

Then when we come to the internal evidences and the matter of the Revelation itself, how much more complete and satisfactory is the impression upon the heart which discerns spiritual things, which has the taste and faculty for perceiving the things of the Spirit, the darkness of nature having been removed! How does the suitableness of Christianity to the state and wants of man, how do the excellency and glory of the doctrines, how do the pure and heavenly morals, how does the attraction of Christ's holy character, how do the blessed tendencies of Christianity upon man's present and eternal welfare, break upon the pious mind! In fact, the inward testimony of Christianity is like the faculty of sight, it discerns all the spiritual objects which constitute the internal evidences of Christianity. And though men may guess at these, without any experience, and may form some notions of them, from education and the language of others, and books, and the remains of natural light; yet they perceive no real glory, nor feel any divine efficacy and power in them; and therefore the conviction must be cold and defective; it will want energy and clearness and unction; the man cannot discern the effulgence of that light which, like the orb of day, is its own best and most glorious evidence. "For as God, in the creation of the world, has so made and formed its parts, has left such characters of his eternal power and wisdom on them, and filled them with such evidences

of their author, that, without any other testimony, they declare their Creator ; so, in his word, he has by his Spirit implanted in it and impressed upon it such characters of his goodness, power, wisdom, holiness, love to mankind, truth, faithfulness, that at all times and all places where the expansion of Scripture is stretched over men by his providence, it declares itself to be his, and makes good its authority from him."³²

5. This proof, therefore, is PECULIARLY NECESSARY IN THE PRESENT DAY, if we would check the progress of unbelief, and promote the revival of pure Christianity. In fact, one principal reason of the decay of real Christianity, and the sad diffusion of infidelity or semi-infidelity amongst us is, that we have left the proofs of Christianity in the cold region of historical document and testimony. It has been the fashion of late years, to make the subject of the evidences an intellectual disquisition merely, a matter of argument on external testimonies. This has arisen from a too general decline in spiritual religion, and from the defence of Christianity having, accordingly, fallen into the hands of men of mere talents and skill in human controversy, who, with all their learning and acuteness, were greatly wanting in a persuasion of the glory of the divine things revealed in the Scriptures, and would, on these points, have yielded too much to the spirit of infidelity. Formerly, the historical arguments were less attended to—indeed it is but of late years, that they have been set in a clear and convincing light ; perhaps they were previously too much overlooked ; men insisted on the inward excellency, the divine character, the self-evident force of the Scriptures.³³

These were the topics of the great masters of divinity. Then came the age of extravagance, enthusiasm, hypocritical religion ; to make way for the

³² Owen.

³³ The τὸ θεῶν, the τὸ αὐτοπιστόν.

profaneness of the court of our second Charles. Infidelity was not long behind. Then the apologists for Revelation, infected with the iniquity of the times, descended from the height which they no longer knew how to defend, into the field of historical debate. They put the evidences as low as possible. They stopped when they had arranged their historical testimonies, instead of pressing on to the internal evidences and the inward witness of Christianity. They manfully and ably maintained the authenticity, credibility, divine authority of the Scriptures, (the inspiration they abandoned;) they made out a strong case as to the lives and testimonies of the apostles; they touched on prophecy, they said something of the morals of Christianity and the originality of Christ's character; they spoke of the resurrection of the dead and a future state. Here they left men,—scarcely a word of redemption, the fall, the adaptation of Christianity to man's wants, the incarnation, the work of the Holy Spirit, the inward efficacy of religion upon the heart, the practical test to which every sincere inquirer might bring its offers.

What was the effect? There never were fewer true believers amongst those educated in the true religion; and infidelity never prevailed so much as in the age in which these historical arguments were handled in this exclusive manner. The Gospel doth not go abroad thus begging for its evidences, so much as some think. It has its highest and most proper evidences in itself.³⁴

Nor does God own those efforts which would tacitly detract from the operations of his grace. If we think to beat Satan, the world, and the unbelief of the human heart with arguments merely, we shall fail. Men are told to look to human testimonies. They rest upon them. They read sound and well-reasoned

³⁴ J. Edwards.

treatises. They are satisfied. But such a conviction gives nothing of that warm and holy persuasion of the truth of God, which an inward obedience to the gospel, and a trial of its promises, would produce. The writers know nothing of these things; perhaps nothing of the main doctrines of the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. The reader rests contented with a general faith—a sort of negative belief—a state of mind neither pleasing to God nor consolatory to man.

But if young people are directed from the first to consider outward evidences as introductory to internal, and all as leading to a personal experience of the power of Christianity, the result is totally different. When this divine glory and excellency of the gospel is felt, and not before, men hold to Christianity as their sheet-anchor, as their joy, their treasure, their boast all the day. They do not let its peculiarities be hidden through false shame; they do not defend it merely as a political engine for the good order of society. They feel that there is a convincing, a subduing power in God's word, which mere schoolmen cannot understand and do not approve; but which the true Christian feels and knows. Neither his reason nor the authority of men have created the belief he has of the truth of the word of God. His reason is satisfied, indeed, and in harmony with its statements, but does not establish its truth. It is the divine glory of redemption, the actual enjoyment and fulfilment of the promises, the real healing of his soul, his communion with God as a father, which commends the gospel to him. As the mirror, brightly polished and cleansed, is fitted to reflect the splendour of the skies; so is his understanding to the truth of the Scriptures, which, as a heavenly and independent sun of glory, darts upon his mind its holy rays, with such a strength and efficacy, that he believes and receives from it what his reason could never have conceived, nor historical arguments have described.

The discoveries of the Bible concerning the Almighty, his perfections, his grace, his redemption in Christ Jesus and the new-creating energy of his Spirit, are now brought near to his heart, by an inward and personal experience, though they still lift up themselves above the reach of his intellectual powers, which wind about their heights, as the traveller about the inaccessible summits of arduous mountains which he silently contemplates and admires.³⁵

Here, then, we close the argument. In our next Lecture we shall offer some DIRECTIONS to the serious inquirer when entering upon the investigation for himself.

In the mean time, I appeal to all sincere Christians before me, and I ask them whether I have overstated the NATURE of this argument, its SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY, the facts on which it rests, or its SINGULAR IMPORTANCE? You know the excellency and grace of Christianity. You know the way in which it has answered all its promises to you, and fulfilled all the expectations it has raised. You know the peace, the tranquillity of conscience, the love of God and Christ, which it has shed forth in your mind. You are making further trial daily of the truth of its declarations. You are assured, by your own inward experience, that it is no cunningly devised fable which you have followed; no cold theory of morals; no abstract discovery of the being and attributes and worship of Almighty God. No! It is the life-giving and animating communion of the Saviour with the heart—it is the participation of a new nature—it is the Holy Spirit indwelling in the soul—it is an emanation of the holiness and felicity of God himself—it is the drinking at the divine fountain of bliss and joy—

³⁵ Dr. C. Malan.

it is the anticipation and pledge of the heavenly happiness.

And how natural it is that this species of evidence should close the various orders of proof, which, like lofty and substantial columns, sustain on every side the Christian edifice! It is altogether in the usual method of the divine dealings with man. There are primary discoveries and impressions which attend the first essays in any science, and there are ulterior and more ripened views which spring from longer attention to phenomena, more careful study, and a richer furniture of knowledge. A man believes the facts of the Newtonian philosophy in youth, from the testimony of others, and a slight acquaintance with a few obvious principles and a few striking experiments. If, however, he give his mind to the pursuit, and spend his life in gathering facts, collecting observations, and applying the results of mathematical science to a sound philosophical analysis, he acquires, in a course of years, a far wider, and more accurate and more practical knowledge of the great subject—a knowledge, not different in kind, but vastly more exalted in degree, more mellowed into a ripened conviction, and more united with all the habits and associations of his mind, than he could have at first.

It is so in Christianity. The outward evidences are designed for those who are not in a state of mind to receive other grounds of belief. These strike the attention. Like the miracles of which they are the record, they call up men's thoughts to the interfering hand of the Almighty, and to the divine Revelation for which he thus displays his power. When these evidences are admitted and acted upon, the internal proofs open to the mind, to confirm the faith and increase the attachment already produced. And after the contemplation of the interior constitution of the religion, the divine excellency of the things revealed

in themselves, and the peculiar effects which they produce upon the heart, complete the proof and give an inward witness to the truth of Christianity, which rises as much above every other, as experience surpasses knowledge ; deliverance and safety, mere barren persuasion ; and the life of God in the soul, those means of belief and salvation, which, without that life, will in truth only increase our guilt and aggravate our condemnation.

LECTURE XX.

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE APPLICATION
OF THE TEST TO WHICH MEN MAY BRING THE
CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

PSALM XXXIV. 8.

O taste and see that the Lord is good.

WE now come to address those who are anxious to make the trial for themselves of the promises which Christianity holds out to the humble inquirer. We have already described the nature of the argument; have established its authority by a reference to the Holy Scriptures; have stated the facts in real life which support every part of the statement, and have shown the singular importance of the result deduced.

But the question is so infinitely important, and yet so open to difficulties in its practical application, both from the corruption of man and the busy arts of the great spiritual adversary Satan, that I am anxious to offer, in the present Lecture, some DIRECTIONS to those who may be disposed sincerely to enter upon the inquiry.

And here I would first point out the characters which I have now especially in view.

I have hitherto addressed young professed Christians generally. I have endeavoured to consider the dangers of those who have been brought up in the bosom of Christianity, and to impress them with a sense of the accumulated and various evidences, historical and internal, which surround or spring from the heavenly doctrine. But I now turn to a rather different class, or rather some of the same class, under different circumstances.

I suppose such of them to be collected before me, as have a real desire to make the experiment for themselves of the Christian grace and promises, and to make it in that spirit of humility with which alone a weak and sinful creature can approach aright the infinite God.

I suppose them to have attended to the previous arguments, at least so far as to have some impression upon their minds of the magnificence of the external, and the harmony and excellency of the internal proofs. I suppose them, not merely simple, docile, ready to follow truth as they discover it (which we stated in an early Lecture¹ to be indispensable to any successful consideration of a subject like religion) but something more—I suppose them to feel the importance of the question, to have a conviction fixed on their minds of the awful consequences of a mistake, and to be impressed with the goodness of God, in furnishing such abundant sources of confidence, and especially in proposing his Revelation to the trial of every earnest and docile suppliant.

If they have not come so far as this with me, they are not prepared for the present argument. They must be referred to the preceding Lectures. When they have considered those introductory topics, so as to understand how the question stands, and to desire heartily to enter on a personal trial of religion as a

¹ Lecture II.

matter of experience. we shall be ready to assist them to do so.

At present, I consider the case of the serious, the anxious, the impressible, amongst my hearers.

Whatever may have been your previous conduct, and with whatever particular temptations or difficulties you may now be pressed. Christianity invites you to draw near: she says, in the language of my text, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." She says, by the divine lips of her Founder, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Some of you may have been formerly proud and ambitious in spirit; others inflated with human science and the vanity of intellectual might; others may have been contaminated with the vices, and sensualities, and profligacies of the world; others infected with the ridicule, and levity, and sarcasms, cast upon religion by men of ready wit and thoughtless minds; others may have been merely indifferent, neglectful, buried in the temporalities of this life.

But you have been led to pause. Some calamity, some of the consequences of your own misconduct, which you did not foresee; some stroke of sickness or death in your family; some sermon or devotional treatise or example of piety or portion of the Holy Scriptures, has brought you to consideration. You have stopped in the downward course of sin and folly; you are in a state of mind to listen to what I have further to say. I know not what may be the particular tossings of your thoughts at this moment; but, whatever they are, I have a message to deliver to you.

I invite you to make a trial, in your own case, of those practical parts of Christianity which become matters of experience. when they are duly received. Not indeed, a trial of Christianity, in the sense of deciding whether it be a Revelation from God or not. To settle this great question, you must go to the

proper external proofs; and not think of meddling with the inward witness—a thing quite beyond the range of one unconvinced of the truth of Revelation itself. What you are about to do, is this. Being already convinced of the divine origin of Christianity, from its proper external evidences; and being persuaded of the excellency and sublimity of its chief contents, from the internal evidences, you wish to go on to something further. You have heard of that perception which Christians have of the glory and efficacy of their religion, and of that fulfilment of its promises, which constitute the inward witness of Christianity. And you now desire to attain a similar interior and practical taste of the truth and goodness of the Almighty, by making a trial of his word, and bringing to the test of experiment, in your own case, the reality of the blessings which Christianity proffers.

I dwell on this, because Satan and your corrupt imagination will instantly attempt to confuse and misstate the real point, the moment you are in earnest about your salvation. Remember, then, that you admit the being and perfections of Almighty God; you admit the bonds of primary moral obligation upon man; you admit the heavenly origin of the Christian religion. The question, then, now before you, regards, not the divine authority of Christianity, but the experience of certain practical benefits and blessings, which it promises to all who submit to its directions, and make a trial of its offers. It is not you, in fact, that are making a trial of Christianity, but Christianity that is making a trial of you.

THE DIRECTIONS, THEN, WHICH I WOULD OFFER YOU, in entering upon this practical investigation, are such as these:—Study Christianity in THE BIBLE ITSELF; trace out, in your own heart, the truth of its STATEMENTS CONCERNING MAN; PRAY earnestly to God; use the MEANS OF GRACE; keep your eye fixed ON JESUS CHRIST, the great object of the

Christian religion; and observe how Revelation suits **THE WHOLE OF YOUR CASE AND CONDITION.**

I. STUDY CHRISTIANITY IN THE BIBLE ITSELF; comparing, in the first place, the general character of its contents, with the state of the world, and the mass of evidence adduced for the truth of the gospel.

Those who hesitate about Revelation, know nothing, generally speaking, or next to nothing, of the Bible. They have never attentively read, with the express design of knowing and obeying the will of God, if it should prove to be found there, the pages of the inspired volume. They take up their notions of what Christianity is, from its enemies; from the current misrepresentations of the day; from a few insulated, and, perhaps, perverted facts. They compare some gross mis-statements of the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, with their own off-hand judgment and taste, or even inclinations; and upon the appearance of incongruity, difficulty, impossibility, they doubt of the Revelation itself. In this way, the religion which they profess to inquire after, has never been fairly understood. The whole question has been involved in the obscurity which a vain and careless world, or a corrupt heart, diffuses, like mists, about the unwelcome but momentous subject.

This may have been your case, my young friends, in some measure; but it must not be your case any longer. If you would make a trial of the practical effects of Christianity upon your own minds, you must understand what it is; what it proposes to do for man; what it discovers; what it requires. To do this, you must study the Bible itself. You must come up to the fountain of life, and not drink at the scanty and impure streams of human opinion and passion.

Begin with the gospels. Read for once, in a docile spirit, and as one feeling something of his ignorance and demerit before Almighty God, the narrative of

the life of Christ, his birth, his miracles, his doctrine, his manner of teaching, his divine conversations. Something strikes you as you read. You feel a penetrating awe come over you in the presence of the Son of God. There is a majesty and authority in every thing he did ; a sweetness and attractiveness which cannot but arrest your attention. You perceive what his religion proposes to do for man—to impart life. You find him every where speak of bestowing pardon, of raising man from sin and condemnation, of revealing salvation in the ransom of the cross. You stand with the disciples, and “are astonished at his doctrine, whilst he speaks as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”²

You have now fairly begun ; you are interested ; you have perused carefully the gospels ; you perceive continual references to the prophecies of a preceding dispensation of religion. Turn to some of those numerous prophecies which the Evangelists notice as accomplished in our Lord's life and sufferings. Read the prophet Isaiah ; meditate, with a noble penitent,³ on the 53rd chapter. You are thus landed in the Old Testament—the patriarchal ages, and the economy and law of Moses. Begin the Old Testament in its order : read the account of the creation and fall of man ; mark the call of Abraham, after a lapse of two thousand years, when idolatry, in consequence of that fall, had overspread the world ; see the dispensation of Moses, five hundred years later, rising out of the redemption from Egypt. Follow the annals of the people of Israel ; connect the historical books with the contemporary prophecies ; then intersperse the devotional writings, dwelling especially upon the book of Psalms.

What is the general impression of this course of study ? You see one spirit pervade the whole. It

² Matt. vii. 28, 29.

³ Earl of Rochester.

is one Revelation, divided into several parts. It proposes to bring man back to God; it opens a wonderful plan of redemption, which it gradually develops, till, in the later prophets, it melts into the Evangelical history. It bids man pray; it calls him to repent, to believe, to rely on the mercy of God, through an atonement; to obey conscience, to shun the society of the wicked. What does it promise? Not to remove all the evils of this life, which are the consequences of sin, but to alleviate the most pressing—to give pardon, peace, strength, consolation in this world, whilst it prepares man for, what is the consummation of its designs, the happiness of another.

With these discoveries, or rather new impressions upon the heart, turn now to the apostolical writings, the last and finishing part of the inspired volume, composed after the ascension of our Saviour, and the promised fulness of the Holy Ghost.

You see in the Epistles all the practical bearings of Christianity developed; the ends of Christ's incarnation and death; the virtue of his sacrifice; the intention of the Mosaic ceremonies; the preparatory and imperfect character of the legal dispensation; the perfect provisions of the evangelical. Much will appear to you mysterious, difficult, incomprehensible, in the details; especially at the first perusal. But you have now some humility of mind; and will allow the great Creator to be wiser than man, the creature of a day. And it is to the general impression made upon you, as a serious inquirer, anxious for truth—conscious, in some degree, of demerit, aware of weakness and ignorance,—that I am now directing your thoughts. I would draw you off from the consideration of the gospel in the mere aspect of its mysteries, to the practical effects which they are designed to produce.

You see Christianity is nothing more than natural religion amplified, purged, elevated, rendered practi-

cable by a stupendous act of mercy, the gift of the only begotten Son of God to die for sin, and of the renovating Spirit of grace.

Mark the effects which the gospel produced on the hearts and prospects of its first converts. What a change, what a deliverance, what a light in darkness, what a joy amidst the miseries of a pagan world ; what an impress of God upon the soul of the convert ! It is a new heart communicated ; a new life ; a new turn and bias to all the powers of the rational nature ; a birth from above.

Close now the sacred book, and look around you in the world ; recall the annals of the past ages ; retrace the history of mankind. You behold every thing with new eyes ; you see God knows the state of man ; you see that the misery, blindness, perverseness, corruption, folly, vices of mankind ; that their uncertainty on all the fundamental points of religion, their dread of God as an enemy, their apprehensions of futurity,—that all meet and agree with the provisions of the gospel ; whilst the provisions of the gospel meet and agree with these wants. The phenomena of the world around you exactly correspond with the statements of the Bible.

Now then, put these things together ; and afterwards reflect on the mass of evidence of every kind, with which the Christian religion was introduced to your notice.

I ask, if already some new sensations do not spring up in your bosom ? I ask, if some fresh hopes do not visit you of attaining truth ? I ask, if a new view of things does not dawn upon your mind, now that you begin in earnest to study what religion is, and what it proposes to do for man ?

Yes, I have surely gained my cause thus far ! Yes, some new persuasion of the divinity of the Scriptures is moving in your mind, quite different from the traditional assent you once gave ! Something within

you says, " If this surprising exhibition of the love of God in his own Son—if this prodigious scheme of redemption be but true, it will make me happy ; it will relieve me from the darkness and agitation and doubt which I sometimes feel. And why should it not be true? Are my prejudices, or those of the world, of any weight on such a subject? How can the gospel be otherwise than true? Is it possible that Almighty God can have surrounded an imposture with such authority of miracles; with such fulfilments of prophecy; with such supernatural aids in the propagation, and continuance, and effects of the religion? Is it possible, that, with such a suitableness to the state and wants of man, with such a sublime system of doctrine, with such a pure morality, with so divine a Founder, with such a holy tendency,—the religion should be false? No! it cannot be. The very thought is absurd—impossible! It cannot be, that all the attestations of truth should be a mere signet upon a forged revelation! No—all is true. I leave, for the present, difficulties which may, perhaps, be cleared up hereafter; but the Bible speaks to my heart. It is its own best defence; it carries its own evidence with it; it is divine."

II. TRACE OUT, in the next place, IN YOUR OWN HEART AND CHARACTER, THE TRUTH OF THE PARTICULAR STATEMENTS OF THE BIBLE, AS TO THE CONDITION OF MAN AND HIS GUILT BEFORE GOD.

You are now in a frame of mind to do this; you are making a trial, in all simplicity, of the first promises of Christianity to those who seek her; you have received an impression from the perusal and comparison of the contents of the Bible, which has brought you out from the mere tameness of educational assent. Take, then, in the next place, one head of revealed truth. Verify in your own heart one part of the Bible, and that a capital part; a part on which all the

other divisions proceed ; a part which I allow to be most distasteful to man at first, but yet which, if once examined candidly and humbly, will be found to correspond with matter of fact, and to open to you fully the design of the whole Revelation.

Read again, and catch the impression of the language of sacred Scripture, as to the state of man since the fall ; as to his weakness, blindness, corruption, perverseness, propensity to depart from God, unaptness to what is spiritually good. You will find that Revelation is addressed throughout to the weak, the unworthy, the miserable ; and that if you did not feel yourself to be of this number, the Bible would not be suited for you. But go on. You begin to be conscious within yourself of a moral disorder ; you will soon lose your high opinion of yourself, and your fond notions of self-righteousness.

Consider what a contradictory creature the Bible describes man to be. How it degrades him on one hand, as to his actual condition, and raises him, on the other, as to his original capacities, as we formerly showed.* Does not this picture resemble you ? Is not this the exact portrait, lineament by lineament, of your heart ?

Proceed—read the history of the church and of the world, as given in the faithful, but humiliating, records of Revelation, with the view of better discovering the state of man. What are the annals of the chosen people ? what are the glimpses given of mankind and the pagan nations ? what are the facts, as there collected ? How frightful the vices ; how unjust and interminable the wars ; how debasing the idolatries ; how profligate the cruelties there exhibited !

From the history, go on and search the prophetic and devotional books ; examine the New Testament ; read the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epis-

* Lect. XIV.

ties, in order to see what man is; what the extent of his misery and guilt ! You discover the same features in every part of the Bible. From the commencement to the close of the sacred canon, man is described, is addressed, is treated, is exhibited as a sinner, guilty, wandering from God, condemned, miserable, unable to deliver himself.

Now look within, and ask yourself, “ Is not all this truth, so far as my own heart can be a specimen of that of others ? Am I not this very perverse, wayward, contradictory, irresolute creature ? Is not my mind as prone to wickedness as that of the individuals and nations of whom I read ? The conviction on my conscience is faint—self-love struggles hard ; but truth will make its way. The Bible knows me better than I know myself. All history, and all experience, confirm its statements ; but, what is to me more than a thousand arguments—my own heart confirms the account. I am this weak, fallen creature, thus depicted in the sacred word.”

Read now, with attention, the strong passages throughout the Scriptures, which assert that depravity of man's nature, as a point of doctrine, from which these histories, and confessions, and facts, spring. Compare, for example, our Lord's declaration of what flows from the human heart. “ From within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, blasphemy, foolishness ;”⁵ with his assertion,—“ That no man can come unto him, except the Father draw him.”⁶ And take both passages, and compare them with St. Paul's statement of “ the human heart being enmity against God ;” of there “ being in our flesh no good thing ;” of man “ being far from God, alienated in his mind by wicked works, dead in trespasses and sins.”⁷

⁵ Mark vii. 21, 22.

⁶ John vi. 44.

⁷ Rom. viii. 7 ; Rom. vii. 18 ; Col. i. 21 ; Eph. ii. 1.

Then go back to the first pages of Revelation, and meditate on the declaration, "Every imagination of man's heart is only evil continually." And let the holy Psalmist give in his testimony: "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."*

You see, all conspires to the same result. The general and demonstrable fact with regard to man, is, that the habit of his heart is dislike and resistance to the Creator who gave him birth. The charge is a gloomy one; but shrink not from the consideration of it. A patient does not shrink from knowing his bodily maladies, in order to obtain a cure; he overcomes his reluctance to entertain a bad opinion of himself; he overcomes his reluctance to find the disease is deeply seated, and has infected his whole frame; he overcomes his reluctance to be told that a totally new method of treatment is indispensable. So do you, as to the infinitely more important question of your spiritual condition. Nothing so touches the heart as this discovery of the secret movements of man's perverseness and corruption.

Two things strike you: the one is, that you had never attended to the state of your heart, or your spiritual relation to God, but had been going on in ignorance of yourself and of your first and most momentous duties—this is one discovery; you had been living as "without God in the world." The other is, that when you attempt to do good, your heart does not follow the dictates of the understanding, but breaks like a deceitful bow—falls short, turns aside, and betrays you.

These are the very things the Bible tells you. Go on, then, in the further study of this wonderful book—it will lay open the secrets of your heart more and more. You cannot now be satisfied without a full acquaintance with the truth of things. You say to those around you, as the Samaritan woman, "Come,

* Gen. vi. 5, Ps. li. 5.

see a man that told me all that ever I did ; is not this the Christ ?"—Yes, he is the Christ : the book which reveals this, is the word of God—the religion which proceeds on the knowledge of the human heart, is the true religion. Your general impression of awe and confidence, produced by the perusal of the Bible, is now deepened into some personal conviction of sinfulness. The single part of it which you have taken and verified by your own state and character, gives you an assurance that it is the word of God, more practical and of another kind from that which sprung from the general comparison of the parts of the Revelation with each other, and your discovery of its unity, harmony, and high end. You have now found out your disease, and are in a way to a cure. You now see how unreasonable was your former state of mind, when you had only an educational prejudice in favour of Christianity, when you cherished doubts, and rested satisfied in ignorance of the Bible and of yourself. You see also the unreasonableness of the conduct of others, who are acting now as you yourself once acted. You see how entirely their aversion from the holy character of God, and the humiliating doctrine of man's apostacy from him, springs from that very depravity which they deny, and accounts to you for their negligence and unbelief. You see, in a word, that this one truth of man's corruption, opens the whole state of the world, of the heart, of the scheme of redemption, of the necessities and the miseries of man, of the ends and importance of Revelation.

But I hasten—

III. To offer another direction. PRAY FERVENTLY TO GOD FOR HIS GRACE TO ACCOMPANY YOUR ENDEAVOURS.

Careless and profane people never pray ; the proud and thoughtless never pray ; the supercilious inquirer never prays. Formerly you never prayed. You may have admitted generally, on the footing of natural

conscience, the obligation of prayer to God, the Creator and Preserver of all men. You could not help in theory admitting this, especially with the reflex light of Christianity cast about you. But you never prayed. You may have addressed the supreme Being in a form of devotion ; but you never prayed. You may have uttered a sigh of anguish, a bitter complaint, an insulated application for some temporal deliverance ; but you never prayed—that is, you never besought Almighty God in earnest for spiritual benefits. You never fervently and humbly begged of God, as the Father of mercies, for the blessings of instruction, spiritual strength, the forgiveness of sins, salvation.

But now you are prepared and disposed to this duty. You want to make the trial of the sacred influences of Christianity. You want to get rid of doubt and hesitation, and to feel the obligations of revealed religion. You are struck with the general impression of the Bible. You are penetrated with the view which it presents of your own heart. There is a sympathy now created, or rather beginning to be created, between the truths of Revelation and your state of mind.

Study, then, in the next place, what the Bible says on the subject of prayer. Make the prayers found there your own. Turn to the Book of Psalms, and say from your own heart, “ Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law.”⁹ “ Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God ; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.”¹⁰

Open the Prophets. Pray with Isaiah, “ Let me come and go up to thy mountain, O Lord, to thy house, O God of Jacob ; and do thou teach me of thy ways, that I may walk in thy paths.”¹¹ Pray according to the promise in Ezekiel, “ Give me, O Lord, a new heart, and put a new spirit within me, and take

⁹ Psalm cxix. 18.

¹⁰ Psalm cxliv. 10.

¹¹ Isaiah ii. 3.

away the stony heart out of my flesh, and give me a heart of flesh."¹²

Go to the Gospels. Read the blessed Saviour's promises made to prayer ; especially of the gift of the Holy Spirit—" Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For if ye, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO THEM THAT ASK HIM."¹³ Approach, then, and make your prayer ; ask, seek, knock. Pray especially for the Holy Spirit to assist, to illuminate, to renew you ; to produce in you all those effects which in your reading of the Bible, you observed were produced in the first Christian converts.

From the Gospels, proceed to the Acts of the Apostles ; read the inquiries, the prayers of the true penitents. Make those inquiries and those prayers your own. Say with the hearers of St. Peter and the apostles, " Men and brethren, what shall we do ?"¹⁴ Say with the Philippian jailor, " Sirs, what must I do to be saved ?"¹⁵ Fall prostrate before the Almighty with Saul of Tarsus, and say, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?"¹⁶

Then open the Epistles, and pray, as St. Paul does for the Ephesians, " That the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened :"¹⁷ or as the same apostle for the Colossians, " That you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."¹⁸

Proceed thus in tracing the spirit of prayer diffused through the Bible, and adopt the forms there left for your direction. Prayer is the attitude in which revelation would place you. All its blessings are granted

¹² Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

¹⁴ Acts ii. 37.

¹⁶ Acts ix. 6.

¹³ Luke xi. 9—11.

¹⁵ Acts xvi. 30.

¹⁷ Eph. i. 18

¹⁸ Col. i. 9.

to prayer. Approach God thus, though it be with feebleness, with conscious demerit. You must depend upon his grace in your religious inquiries, as you must depend upon his providence in the natural duties and concerns of life. If you desire to make an experiment of the promises of Christianity, you must do it in the prescribed method ; that method is self-renunciation—prayer for grace—sense of demerit—acknowledgment of weakness and guilt. If you come to the Bible in pride, you will depart empty away. The great God is not to be mocked, to be contemned, to be insulted by a worm like man. If he condescends to make promises of inward effects on the heart, of a seal of peace and consolation, of answers to prayer, of an experimental knowledge of the blessings of Christianity, these can only be had in a way of humility and supplication. They must be sought, not demanded ; implored as a boon, not exacted as a right ; obtained in the spirit of penitent contrition, not seized with the hand of presumption and self-conceit.

But I need not dwell on this. The discoveries you have made of your own heart, have levelled in the dust the high tower of pride and self-justification which you had built up, and have brought you to penitence. You are prepared to seek, with the eagerness of a beggar imploring an alms, the bounties of the divine grace. Already you begin to pray. Your heart desires, and expresses what it desires. Religion interests you. You feel your wants. All is in progress for your satisfaction.

IV. Let me advise you, in the next place, to wait for the gradual attainment of what you seek **IN THE USE OF THE MEANS WHICH GOD HAS PROMISED TO BLESS, AND IN THE CONSCIENTIOUS PRACTICE OF DUTY AS YOU DISCOVER IT.** The more you study the Bible, the more you will see that you are placed in the midst of a system of means ; that you

are under a moral government ; that God bestows his blessings upon the waiting soul ; that nothing can be done hastily or mechanically, but that we must act as reasonable and accountable beings, and humbly expect the blessings promised in the way prescribed. You are now prepared for this. Prayer is “ waiting upon God, the attending daily at his gates, the watching at the posts of his doors.”¹⁹ Probably the idea you once formed of religious experience, was that of something violent, sudden, distinguishable at once from the operations of your own mind ; something involving an irrational and unaccountable excitement ; such is the notion which “ the disputer of this world ”²⁰ forms of the experience of religion. You find it very different : you find the influences of grace are gradual, soft, imperceptible at the time, congruous with the rational nature of man, and chiefly to be traced in their effects ; and yet mighty and efficacious ; for as the wind “ bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”²¹ In these means of grace—that is, in prayer, in reading God’s word, in attending the public preaching of the gospel, in the conversation and advice of the pious—you must wait for further light ; and you shall not wait in vain. In the expectations thus raised there is a pledge of their fulfilment.

In the meanwhile, delay not the time to do what you know to be your duty, and to avoid what you know to be sin. “ To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God,”²² is the Almighty’s promise. In doing the divine will, a thousand things will become more plain, and a thousand difficulties will sink before you. In attempting obedience, you will perceive more sensibly the truths already believed ; especially that of your own corrup-

¹⁹ Prov. viii. 34.

²¹ John iii. 8.

²⁰ 1 Cor. i. 20.

²² Psalm l. 23.

tion and inability. In this way you will meet God, and testify the sincerity of your desire to experience his grace. In this way you will discover your need of that peculiar revelation of mercy to which I would now call your attention.

V. Let me counsel you to keep your eye fixed on THE GREAT OBJECT WHICH CHRISTIANITY REVEALS, as the only source of relief and consolation. All I have at present said, is introductory. The person and glory of Jesus Christ our Saviour is the centre-point, the main characteristic, the distinguishing fact of the whole of Revelation. You are surely now prepared to behold the mysterious cross on which he expired, as a sacrifice for sin. You are eager to receive the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, for which all your previous inquiries have been disposing you. You want pardon; you want peace with God; you want something as a ground of merit in approaching the throne of grace—you find nothing in yourself but infirmity, sin, guilt. Behold, then, the person of Christ, the substitute for man, “bearing sin in his own body on the cross: dying, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God.” Read in his death, pardon, peace, and salvation. “Look unto him whom you have pierced,” and, while you mourn for sin, rejoice in the forgiveness which his sacrifice promises. All blessings flow from that great event. God is reconciled—the law is satisfied—the moral government of the Almighty is vindicated—and the Holy Spirit is procured and diffused; and in the gift of that divine agent (for redemption, as we have frequently noticed, reveals the triune source of mercy to man—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) all blessings of grace, regeneration, power to believe, fortitude, joy, resignation, hope, obedience, are virtually included.

You will doubtless find a thousand difficulties start up in your mind, and oppose the simple act of faith,

by which you are to receive those benefits. Though you exercise faith in human things every day of your life, yet when you attempt to apply this principle to divine, a difficulty arises. But the Holy Spirit is the author of faith. Pray to him for the grace to believe. Say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."²³ Silence your imaginations, your reasonings, your objections. God reveals the infinite gift of his Son; God declares it to be the effect of his love to man; God points out the grand ends for which the gift is made, and the practical uses for which it is to be employed. But God does not ask your opinion of the redemption itself: you are no judge of God's incomprehensible reasons. If you wish for a real acquaintance with the effect of his religion upon the heart, you must take the method he prescribes. You must believe, obey, trust in his "well-beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased."²⁴ You do so. See—the struggle is over. Your sense of pressing exigency, the anguish of an alarmed conscience, the conviction that "God's thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways his ways, but that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts,"²⁵ carry every thing with it. You cast yourself at the feet of the Saviour, and endeavour to rely upon his word for all the blessings of salvation. You implore the Holy Spirit to enable you to see his glory more distinctly, and rejoice in his cross with more delight, and follow his footsteps in the obedience of your life. All this is done with weakness and trembling of heart; but it is done with simplicity; and increasing vigour will follow.

VI. Let me direct you now to compare all the parts of Christianity as you have gone over them, and

²³ Mark ix. 24.

²⁴ Matt. iii. 17.

²⁵ Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

OBSERVE HOW THEY CONSTITUTE A WHOLE, AND MEET ALL THE NECESSITIES OF YOUR CASE. Study still the Bible in which these truths and the uses of them are contained. There you began, there you must continue your search. You have caught its general impression and main design upon man—you have verified in your own heart its statements about the guilt and ruin of sin—you have adopted the prayers which it taught you to offer—you have persevered in the means of instruction it presented to you—you have been brought up to its main discovery, the person and sacrifice of the Son of God—you have perceived the divine agent, who applies all its truths to the heart, the Holy Spirit. Reflect now upon the bearing of all these things. Observe how they meet all the case of man, (as we observed in a previous Lecture,²⁶) how they supply his WANT OF MERIT, by the sacrifice of Christ, and his WANT OF STRENGTH, by the operations of the blessed Spirit. Mark how they bring him to the knowledge of the most important truths relating to himself, his duty, his fall, his guilt, his end. Consider how they exactly fill up the void which natural religion could not supply; the gaping void, created by the want of sanction, the want of a distinct knowledge of the supreme Being, the want of a revealed and intelligible moral law, the want of a way of pardon, the want of motives and strength for obedience, the want of peace and consolation of conscience, and the want of an express assurance of the immortality of the soul and an eternal judgment.²⁷ Yes, Christianity is the natural and essential religion for which God first created man, republished, supplied, restored, enlarged, purified, ennobled with an additional remedial dispensation by the Son and Spirit of God. How grand, how efficacious, how complete is the scheme of Revelation! How it meets all your

²⁶ Lect. XIV.²⁷ Lect. II.

desires ; responds to your thirst after happiness ; answers to all the capacities of your rational being ; unites the glory of the Creator with the welfare of the creature ! Nothing is so reasonable, so elevating, so consolatory, so adapted for man, as the Christian religion. You feel this in some degree. You feel that all you need now, is a larger measure of its grace and a more entire submission to its commands—that what is wanting, is not in Christianity, but in yourself ; not in its provisions, but in your obedience ; not in the promises and supplies which it offers, but in your acceptance and adherence. Feeble as your attainments are, you are persuaded fully—you are convinced,—that, in proportion as you advance in them, you shall advance in happiness, advance in holiness, advance in peace and consolation and joy.

And now, after offering these directions, let me request you to look back on the course which you have passed, and to observe the RESULT. Let me ask you, whether the Christian religion has not fulfilled in you all its promises, and whether you are not an instance of one who has made a trial of its proffered blessings, and has obtained an inward experience and witness of their reality ? This may not have struck you. At an early stage of your inquiries, it could not. Even now it may not at times be very apparent. It is rather upon reflection and at intervals, that you will be able to trace out the accomplishment of the blessings of Christianity in your own case. But after a period, perhaps a considerable period—for the minuter differences in each inquirer's case are multiplied and various—you may be led to reflect thus :

“ Surely I am myself a witness of the truth of Christianity. I feel that its general character is pregnant with blessings to man. Its description of my own case is most accurate. Its spirit of prayer and

the models it leaves me, are most suited to my feelings. The system of means in which it places me, becomes the glorious God, and is adapted to man his reasonable creature. The person of Christ, his condescension, his sacrifice, the gift of his Holy Spirit, are beyond measure stupendous and consolatory. The completeness of the whole Revelation carries with it the impress of the great and good Being from whom it came.

“And am not I an instance of its truth to its promises? I find an awe upon my mind; I feel a conviction of my sinfulness; I am led to pray; I use the methods of instruction appointed me; I behold the Lamb of God; I trust to a divine sanctifier; I see every thing in Christianity which I can want or desire, or am capable of receiving;—and what is all this, but the very impression which Christianity declares shall be produced in the heart of every willing student of her records? What is this but an inward witness to its truth?

“But I have more: I have had many answers to my prayers—I have sought grace, and I have found it. I have implored teaching, and it has been granted. I have asked for the Holy Spirit, and I have not asked in vain. I have begged of God for strength and wisdom and consolation; and I have obtained these blessings.

“More than this: I am a monument, unworthy as I am to speak on such a theme, of the power and grace of the gospel. It has brought me, or at least is bringing me, as I trust, from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It has changed my proud and stubborn heart. It has already made me happy to a certain extent in believing, and it sets before me a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

“And as to the holy influence of Christianity, is it not already apparent in me? Am I not more vir-

tuous, more contented in my mind, more diligent in my calling, more tender in my family, more subdued in my tempers and conduct than I was before?

“And as to the prospects of the future, have I not a dawn of hope? Is not something of the peculiar glory and excellency of the gospel apparent to me, and is it not inviting me onwards? Have I not support under afflictions here, and a humble expectation of beholding my God in peace hereafter?

“What more, then, do I need? I formerly talked of the evidences of Christianity; but I never sought to be satisfied upon safe grounds. I formerly inquired, but with a wish not to find the religion true. I formerly scorned the devotional spirit, and the distinguishing doctrines, and the pure morals of Christianity: I had my reward. I found no peace; I found no satisfying conviction; I remained a proud, careless, discontented, unhappy creature; I was living in the practice of many vices, and in the omission of many duties. But now I am at peace; now I pursue after holiness; now I acquiesce, at least I desire to do so, in the will, the whole revealed will of God; now I ascribe it to the undeserved goodness of God, that I was led in earnest to make this inquiry, which I trust will issue in salvation.

“I am now only ashamed of my former perverseness and rebellion of heart; I mourn that I should so long have resisted truth, hardened my conscience, grieved the blessed Spirit, and provoked God. I lament also over my present weakness of faith, irresolution, inconsistency. But I feel that Christianity has fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, all its promises to its disciples. I feel that it makes me a better man; that it keeps me from sin; that it urges me to duty; that it provides me with resources of pardon and strength; unites me to my Saviour; makes my heart a temple of the Holy Ghost, and gives me an anticipation of eternal glory. Whatever others may do, I shall hold

by the Christian doctrine : whatever others may say, I shall declare the inward testimony to its truth, of which I am a partaker ; however others may depart from the profession of Christ, it will be my desire to say, ' Lord, to whom shall I go ? Thou hast the words of everlasting life ; and I believe and am sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' "

Such is some inadequate sketch of the feelings of one who is in earnest about Christianity, and makes a trial of its grace.

The cases of individuals are so various, that a thousand differences will arise in each : but the main features will be the same ; and the directions and the result are, therefore, easily rendered applicable. Let the inquirer study the Bible with an application to his own heart ; let him pray for divine aid ; let him use the means of grace ; let him believe in the Saviour and pray for the Holy Spirit ; let him mark the complete adaptation of Christianity to all his wants ; and he shall find a gradual effect produced on his heart, which is the seal and inward witness of the truth of the promises on which he relies.

And what shall I further say, in concluding these Lectures on the inward test of Christianity ? What shall I add after the remarks made in the last discourse on the NATURE of the argument, its SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY, the FACTS on which it rests, and its SINGULAR IMPORTANCE ? What, after the DIRECTIONS offered in the present ?

Let every one before me enter for himself upon this momentous question of the practical experiment of the Christian promises. Take the preparatory steps at least. Consider all the admissions you are compelled to make, as believing in the being and attributes of God. Remember the primitive and indissoluble

obligations which chain you to the throne of the Almighty. Call to mind the responsibility you are under for all you know and all you might have known.

Recollect, especially, these two things : Unless you make a practical trial of Christianity, your historical faith will only increase your condemnation ; and, If you do make a trial, you will have no need to put to an experiment any thing else relating to religion.

I. I say, UNLESS YOU MAKE A TRIAL OF PRACTICAL RELIGION, YOUR MERELY HISTORICAL FAITH WILL ONLY INCREASE YOUR CONDEMNATION. For you will not have to plead that you did not know Christianity ; you cannot say you had not received it as a divine Revelation ; you can never assert that you were not warned and admonished of your duty, your danger, your remedy. Your historical faith, then, if it do not result in submission of heart to the yoke of the gospel, will turn your accuser. It brought you up to the throne of mercy—before which you refused to bend ; it compelled you to admit the truth of a religion—against which you closed your heart ; it made known the claims of a heavenly Father and placed you before his feet—and you spurned his grace and salvation ; it presented to you a way of making an experiment of his promises—and you rejected the offer. What, then, will be your condemnation, if you persist in your rebellion of heart before God ? O, dare not his vengeance ! O, provoke him not to take his Holy Spirit from you ! O, harden not your heart, like Pharaoh of old ; but yield yourselves unto God. Unknow what you have learned of truth, you cannot. Escape from its obligations, you cannot. But you may yet seize the advantages offered you ; you may yet enter on the practical duties of the religion which you profess ; you may yet turn your historical knowledge to its proper purposes, by considering the argument we have been enforcing, and following the directions which we have given.

II. Remember, also, that if you once make a trial of real Christianity, YOU WILL HAVE NO NEED OF PUTTING TO THE EXPERIMENT ANY OTHER FORM OF RELIGION OR IRRELIGION EVER KNOWN: for this important reason—that you have already been trying, in fact, all your past life, one or other of the pretended religious systems which are abroad in the world.

INFIDELITY makes fair promises. You need not try it; you know already too much of “the evil heart of unbelief.”²⁸ The tendency to infidelity is the cause of all your reluctance, coldness, and misery.

Will you try IDOLATRY? The first converts to Christianity, and the converts from heathenism in every age, have tried it; and your own natural propensity to idolize the creature is surely painful enough to convince you that idolatry has nothing to offer.

Will you make an experiment of MAHOMETANISM? What! when it flatters all those principles of pride, and sensuality, and contempt of others, and love of voluptuous pleasures, which you have too much tried?

There is nothing left untried by you, but real Christianity. Enter, then, upon this important experiment. While none but the true Christian can form a just opinion of divine Revelation, every true believer can form a sufficient judgment of every other religion. We know quite enough of all other pretended remedies for man’s miseries, to make us sure that their professions are fallacious. The little experience we have of Christianity, makes us daily more and more sure that it is true; that all its “promises are yea and amen;” that not a thing hath failed of what was proffered. Every fellow-believer whom we meet affords us a new evidence of its divine power. Every trial we pass through, every storm we encounter, every day we live, increases our conviction; every sermon we deliver or hear, augments our admiration of Chris-

²⁸ Heb. iii. 12.

tianity; our whole history, since we have known the gospel, has been a putting its claims to a practical test.

If questioned concerning its truth now, or in after life, or in the solemn hour of death, let our humble, yet thankful declaration concerning it invariably be,
" WHEREOF WE ALL ARE WITNESSES." ²⁹

²⁹ Acts ii. 32.

LECTURE XXI.

THE VANITY AND FUTILITY OF THE OBJECTIONS
BROUGHT AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

2 PETER iii. 3, 4, 8, 9.

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts; and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

It is impossible to pass over entirely, in a work like the present, the objections which unbelievers advance against the Christian faith. So holy and humiliating a Revelation must, of course, meet with much resistance in the pride and passions of erring man; and this resistance will be in proportion to the magnitude of the discoveries, the incomprehensibility of the mys-

teries, and the purity of the precepts which the religion contains.

We might, perhaps, in strict reasoning, dismiss these objections with a very few remarks; for we have, from the first, required in the student of the evidences, a docile and candid mind; ¹ and the faith with which the Revelation is to be received, as we shall show in a following lecture, ² implies a victory over interposing doubts. But we rather prefer entering upon the subject, both because Satan, the great spiritual adversary, chiefly works by the injection of difficulties into the mind, and because, in an age of literary and scientific inquiry like the present, the young are peculiarly open to the shafts of ridicule and scorn.

We enter, therefore, on the subject; and we hope to prove that the slightest review of the main objections of unbelievers, and of their lives and deaths, as compared with those of sincere Christians, will not only leave the evidences in favour of our religion untouched, but will furnish a strong subsidiary argument in support of them. We shall be enabled, we trust, not only to defend our own fortress, but to storm that of the enemy—to take possession of his arms—turn them against himself, and complete his overthrow by the means of his own weapons.

In the present Lecture we shall consider **THE OBJECTIONS THEMSELVES**; in the following, **THE LIVES AND DEATHS** of those who advance them.

In both, we shall most especially need the aid of Almighty God, to remove prejudices from our understandings, and to sway our hearts; for nothing can convince a prejudiced mind; the medium of persuasion is wanting. Unless, therefore, we humbly implore the influence of God's grace in our study of this subject, it will be impossible for us to attain any solid satisfaction.

¹ Lect. II.

² Lect. XXIII.

How, then, shall we best treat the question of **THE OBJECTIONS THEMSELVES?** We cannot, perhaps, do better than by acting as we did in the case of the **Tendency of Christianity.**³ We then adverted to the subjects most nearly allied to the one which was before us; and considered how a tendency was demonstrated in the instances of reason, of moral virtue, and of natural religion. In like manner, let us now begin, by considering how the speculative objections, which men raise against one or more of these principles, are treated.

The beneficial effects of moral virtue on the happiness of man are admitted; facts prove it; concurring testimony of all kinds sustains the case; experience confirms it daily.

The natural government of God in the world is propounded upon the footing of innumerable traces of design and contrivance, of goodness, and of provision for man, in the works of creation and providence.

The obligation of religion, as unquestionably due from man to God, his Creator, Benefactor, Judge, is asserted; conscience, the final causes of things, a retributive providence, the very powers and faculties of man, prove the truth.

Now, objections are perpetually raised against these elementary principles. And how are they met? The objections are divided into two classes. If they are advanced by candid inquirers, with an apparent desire of attaining to truth; if they seem to rest on fact and experience; if they are directed with fairness against the evidences of the principle in question; if they are consistent with each other, and urged temperately and calmly; if, in short, they appear to carry any force with them, when fairly stated—they are then considered with care, and answered cautiously and solidly by the detection of the fallacies contained in them,

³ Lect. XVIII.

and by the adduction of more decisive and overwhelming facts and reasonings.

But if the objections are urged with no apparent desire of attaining truth ; if they are merely speculative ; if they are directed not against the proofs, but against the matter of the principles which the proofs go to establish ; if they are contradictory with themselves, and put intemperately and unfairly ; and if, after all, they are found to be merely cavils, the offspring of human ignorance or pride, they are altogether disregarded—theory against positive facts is considered to be of no avail—barren conjectures against the experience of mankind, are accounted worse than folly.

Let us, then, proceed in this manner with the objections against Christianity. Let us divide them into two classes. Let the doubts advanced modestly and fairly by the sincere inquirer, be tenderly treated and diligently examined. This is what we have been aiming at throughout this work. But let the cavils and objections of the presumptuous and overbearing be met with a decided protest against their whole spirit and aim. This is what we shall now attempt ; and, in doing so, shall endeavour to render some further aid to the young and inexperienced Christian. For the unreasonable objections of the sceptic, by which he attempts to poison the minds of the uninformed, will be found to resolve themselves into those very risings of pride and vain curiosity which are natural to the fallen heart of man, which every Christian feels, and feels continually ; but which he outweighs by contrary considerations, and subdues by the influences of grace and the persuasion arising from a solid experience of the effects of Christianity on his heart and life.

We shall show then, first, that the objections of infidelity are, for the most part, speculative opinions, directed not against the evidences, but the matter of

Revelation, and altogether **INADMISSIBLE**; next, that they are full of inconsistencies, and put intemperately and insidiously, and are in fact **CONTRADICTORY**; in the third place, that they are, in themselves, the obvious dictates of ignorance and pride of heart, and therefore **FRIVOLOUS**; and that, lastly, they are merely trials of man's sincerity and submission of heart to God, and **CONFIRM** rather than weaken the Christian evidences.

In a word, the reasonings of unbelievers are **INADMISSIBLE, CONTRADICTORY, FRIVOLOUS, and CONFIRMATORY** of the religion which they were advanced to undermine.

I. The objections against the Christian religion are INADMISSIBLE.

Common sense tells us that direct and positive proofs, resting upon facts, and confirmed by experience, must be rebutted by direct and positive proofs, resting upon clearer facts, confirmed by a wider experience, and directed against the evidences supporting the case which is in question. Now, we shall find, that the objections of infidelity are speculative opinions merely, and thus wrong in kind; and aimed against the matter of Revelation, and not the evidences, and thus wrong in object; and on both accounts are utterly inadmissible in all fair reasoning.

They are **WRONG IN KIND**. What can mere conjecture and hypothesis avail against a mass of positive facts, sustained by all history, profane and ecclesiastical, and constituting a body of proof such as the world never before saw?

Even in scientific questions, it is easy to frame objections. A disputant may invent hypotheses, and some of them sufficiently plausible, against any section, for instance, of the *Principia* of Newton. By omitting some link in the chain of reasoning, taking up insulated parts of a subject, and showing them to

be contradictory to some principle, he may make out a case, which to an unfurnished mind appears strong, and yet to a sound reasoner has no force whatever, though it may be difficult for him at first to detect where the fallacy lies. But who regards such sophisms when once exposed?

Much less do men regard such hypotheses in directly practical matters. What weight do they attribute to speculative difficulties in matters of agriculture, commerce, jurisprudence, legislation? What would the sceptic himself say, if his method as to Christianity were applied to his own temporal concerns? If he were sick, and a well-attested medicine were presented to him, what regard would he pay to theoretic objections? If the deeds of an inheritance were made over to him with all the formalities of law—what weight would he give to adverse speculations? No. In human affairs men act, not only against theoretic notions, but expecting them and despising them as a matter of course, they know well enough, that facts, not cavils, are the way to truth; they know that a slight preponderance amidst conflicting facts and testimonies, perpetually determines human conduct—but that where the matters of fact are all on one side, and nothing is on the other but vain reasonings, men overrule such reasonings at once, and follow the sure guide of experience.

And shall we not much more act thus in a concern of such infinite moment as Christianity? What! have we gone through our external and internal proofs, in order to give all up at last to the mere abstract opinions of prejudiced and perverse men? What! have we forgotten the temper of mind in which we stated that the whole subject must be studied, and are we ready to surrender all our hopes to a speculative and ingenious opponent? What! are there not positive and solid facts enough in the arguments, both historical and internal, which we have reviewed, to

dissipate the airy phantoms of men's imaginations? Have we not the series of testimonies from the very days of the apostles; have we not the involuntary attestations of Heathen and Jewish adversaries; have we not the additional confirmations which the discovery of manuscripts, and medals, and inscriptions has been pouring in upon us in every age? Have not also the actual inward effects, the glory and efficacy, the suitableness and excellency of every part of the Christian doctrine, solidity enough to resist the attack of theoretic difficulties, which, perhaps, after all, may turn out to be no difficulties?

Yes: the sublime doctrines of Christianity, its pure and holy precepts, the inimitable character of its founder, its beneficial tendency, the actual experiment and proof of its efficacy in our own souls—these positive benefits, when sustained by the historical proofs of authenticity, credibility, and divine authority, form a solid mass of facts, against which no mere speculations can for a moment be allowed to weigh.

The attempt is monstrous. An unbeliever tells me of petty critical difficulties in the reading of manuscripts or the exactness of a chronological date; he talks of the difficulties to his mind of the Christian mysteries; he complains of the conduct and spirit of many professed Christians.

Now, supposing these or a thousand similar statements were ever so plausible, yet they are chiefly speculative, the fabric of the human brain, unsupported by facts—and therefore what weight have they against the mass of evidences of every kind which sustain the Christian Revelation? A single principle in the Revelation itself—as for instance, the ignorance of man—may overturn them all. But this I am not now concerned with; I merely assert that opinion, and conjecture, and cavil, are worse than nothing, compared with the substantial grounds on which we re-

ceive the divine record. All such objections are wrong in kind.

But this is not all. They are **WRONG ALSO IN THE OBJECT** against which they are directed ; for when we come to look at the topics which are urged by unbelievers, we find that they are not only of a speculative nature, and therefore of no weight against positive fact and experience ; but they are objections not against the evidences, but against the Revelation. They are not arguments about the authenticity, the divine authority, the propagation of Christianity ; but against the matter and contents of Christianity itself.

Now we shut out at once all such reasonings. They are directed to a wrong purpose, they aim at an inadmissible position. We bring you a Revelation from the great, the eternal, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. We detail the proofs of its divine origin. We bid you examine them with the utmost care. We say they are stronger evidences by far, than men are continually acting upon in all like cases. You meet the statements with objections, not to the credentials, not to the testimonies, but to something which appears to you incongruous in the contents of the Revelation. Now against this we enter our decided protest. Speculative reasonings are, after all, of little value against positive facts ; but speculative reasonings, not directed against the facts and evidences of Revelation, but against Revelation itself, are too absurd and too evidently of a wrong class, to be attended to for a moment.

I bring you the history of Livy or Tacitus. I prove the work to be the genuine production of the author. I give the contemporary testimonies. I show you the large quotations from it in every subsequent age. You pass by all my facts—and direct your speculative reasonings against something you dislike in the matter of the history.

I lay before you an act of the British legislature.

I detail the evidences of its authenticity. I show you the incontrovertible records of the Parliament in which it was enacted. I refer you to the printed copy in the archives of the nation. You neglect all these positive matters of fact—and begin to cavil against the contents of the statute !

An ambassador from the Prince and Lord of heaven and earth arrives amongst men. He opens his embassy. He exhibits his credentials. He has the sign manual of his master. You turn from all this testimony—and plunge into metaphysical arguments on what you term the unreasonableness of the message which he delivers !

All this is so manifestly contrary to every principle of fairness and sincerity, that it would never be tolerated on any subject whatever in human affairs ; and therefore, least of all should it be tolerated in a matter so momentous as religion.

The only legitimate ground of argument against Christianity, is against its evidences, not its matter. If it be from God, the matter is divine ; this is a question then beyond and above man. At all events, it is not the primary question—the sole primary inquiry is, are the evidences such as may satisfy a candid person that the Revelation is of divine authority. Till this is settled, every thing else is trifling.

If men have any thing to say against the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, let them advance it. If the series of testimonies of all kinds to the simple fact, that the Scriptures were published at the time when they claimed to be, and were received by the contemporary friends and foes of the religion as the genuine productions of the professed authors—if this can be overthrown, let it be done. The question is open to investigation.

If men have any thing to advance against the credibility of the gospel history, supported as its facts are by all kinds of testimony, Heathen, Jewish, Chris-

tian; and uncontradicted by a single credible witness, let them advance it, and we will hear them.

Or if they have any thing to assert against the divine authority of Christianity, resting on the miracles, the prophecies, the supernatural propagation of the gospel, and its prominent good effects before the face of mankind, let them come forward and make out their case, and we are ready to weigh their arguments.

But then they must of course produce a contrary series of testimonies; they must bring forward facts against our facts; contemporary authors against our contemporary authors; Heathen and Jewish historians whose evidence goes against ours which sustain the credibility. They must oppose to our positive proofs of authenticity, positive proofs of forgery. They must oppose to our historical evidences of credibility, a contrary series of historical documents. They must combat our matters of fact, supporting the divine authority of Christianity, by contradicting matters of fact—all which I need not say no one has even attempted.

But for men, admitting, as those with whom we are arguing profess to do, the being and attributes of God and the accountableness of man, to pass over all these irrefragable proofs, and to turn aside and cavil at the contents of the religion, is so open an act of disobedience and rebellion against God, that nothing but the deep depravity of the human heart could for a moment listen to it. And yet men listen to nothing else. Metaphysical objections against the matter of Christianity is the ground almost always taken by the unbeliever.

We sweep away, then, all these objections at once, as out of place, as directed to an illegitimate object. We stop the argument at the threshold. We say, if the Revelation be indeed from God, it is itself the authority for all it contains: your objections, therefore, must be directed to the question of the evidences

on which the religion rests—and till these are overthrown by historical documents, by a series of positive testimonies, by a fair and manly appeal to the contemporary evidences of the period when the gospel was established, we must consider all your reasonings as mere talk—they are wrong in object; and are on this account, as well as on the ground of their being wrong in kind, utterly inadmissible in the present stage of the argument: they are cavils, not objections; subterfuges, not reasonings; the artifices of a dishonest or confused, not the arguments of a sincere and well-balanced, mind.

But we do not stop here. So triumphant are the evidences of the Christian Revelation, that we go a step further; and, in order to fortify the breasts of ingenuous youth against the shafts of infidelity, we show that,

II. The objections against the Christian religion are CONTRADICTORY, THE ONE TO THE OTHER.

For, on looking a little closer into the statements of unbelievers, we find such confusion and fallacy in their reasonings—such prevarication and dissimulation of the real facts of the case—such concessions made to the Christian faith at one time, and such unfair and intemperate invectives urged at another—such shifting and versatility in different ages, and by different classes of writers, that we may really leave such objections to refute and destroy each other, and may feel yet more completely assured of the truth of a religion, which is only assailed by contradictory speculative opinions.

1. For, what **CONFUSION AND FALSE REASONINGS** do we discover, the closer we examine the difficulties advanced by infidelity! There is nothing clear, nothing tangible, nothing fairly reasoned out upon its proper grounds. The objections of unbelievers prove too much; they sap the foundations of the natural

religion which they profess to support, as well as of the revealed doctrine which they avowedly attack. They deny all human testimony. They subvert the first principles of morals. Their objections are rather the offspring of the ignorant and fallen mind of man, as we have already observed; such as every Christian has felt, and feels continually, and overcomes by faith—than specific doubts sustained by any consistent series of arguments.

They quite forget that the evidences of Christianity are what is termed a cumulative proof; a collective argument, arising, not from one thing, but from many things of various kinds, and springing from independent sources, and contributing in different degrees to the result. They argue as if a single minute objection could invalidate the whole combined truth. They think if they can make good any point against any branch of the Christian evidence, as stated by a less informed or feeble advocate, they have gained their cause. Thus they confuse the question. All their arguments are fallacies. It is well known that in matters of judicial investigation, there is often an overwhelming conviction produced from the combination of a great number of witnesses, no single one of whom could be considered as entitled to the highest degree of credit, from the want of general intelligence, or acquaintance with the particular circumstances of the case, or even from want of character. If such an accidental combination takes place, the evidence becomes perfectly conclusive.⁴ What, then, avail cavils against some smaller points in the cumulative argument? If unbelievers could weaken the force of one half of our proofs, the remainder would be more than sufficient; perhaps even one branch of them—the character of our Lord, for example—would be enough to convince a sincere inquirer. But no single division

⁴ Verplank.

of our evidences has yet been disproved; and the confused objections of mere speculative unbelief against some insulated facts, are like the foaming waves dashing against the deep-rooted rock, which has for ages defied their impotent fury.

The evidences of our religion are like what we mean by strength or effect in architecture, the consequence of the whole edifice erected in such a manner, and seen in its true light. Supposing one argument should be less clearly supported, this leaves the grand mass of proof in its general force and beauty. If a single stone or column seems to an objector's eye inappropriate for upholding or adorning the building, we are not to think that the entire strength or effect depends upon that separate support, when it reposes, and with far greater security, upon the wide, united strength and entire range and system of its fabric.* What, then, avail the incoherent, contradictory speculations of infidelity? Supposing we should not be able to solve explicitly every objection, we may yet be perfectly satisfied upon the whole, and may leave the difficulty for abler hands, or for a more advanced period of our own studies.

2. But further—the PREVARICATION AND DISSIMULATION OF THE REAL FACTS of the case are so apparent in the objections of unbelievers, as to deprive their reasonings of all force. The bold denial of the best attested matters of history; the mis-statement of particular circumstances; the calumnies heaped on the memory of the defenders of Christianity; the false quotations made from their books; alterations in the reading of important passages; the perversion of almost every incident occurring in ecclesiastical and profane historians—these are the arts which disgust every candid and well-informed mind in the writings of sceptics. Was ever such a daring compound of

* Butler, Davison.

prevarication, gross blunders, impudent denial of the most notorious facts, and unblushing dissimulation of the real state of the question, as the pages of the *Age of Reason* exhibited? and yet this wretched stuff was a chief instrument in the spread of infidelity in this country at the period of the French Revolution. Take the works of Gibbon, or Hume, or Voltaire, or Rousseau—there is scarcely a fact which affects Christianity, not perverted or concealed. So grossly is this the case, that the warmest admirers of these writers do not deny it; whilst the artful insinuations, the secret hints and reflections against the Christian religion, cast out incidentally, as it were, and in books and places where they might have been least expected, prove the dishonesty of mind of those who have recourse to such methods of controversy. The main engine of infidelity in France, was an insidious corruption of the streams of literature. Every species of publication, from the fugitive tale to the ponderous *Encyclopedia*, was infected with the moral poison. In fact, deceit and misrepresentation are the arms of this wretched cause. I know of no one work on the side of unbelief, which meets manfully the case, which allows the facts with candour, and then proceeds to a consistent and honest argument upon them.

3. Consider, again, the CONCESSIONS made to the Christian faith at one time, and the UNFAIR AND INTEMPERATE INVECTIVES urged at another.

The concessions of unbelievers are sufficient to establish the Christian religion. The FACTS of the gospel are not denied; the admissions of the three first centuries make this impossible. The simplicity and artlessness of the narratives, that is, the CREDIBILITY, is admitted. Miracles are disputed against generally; but the particular facts of the gospel not being controverted, the MIRACLES are virtually conceded. The fulfilment of the PROPHECIES, though contested by modern infidels, was conceded by the

earlier ones, some of whom attempted to show that the predictions were written after the events. The existence of the Jews in the present day is a fact which carries the truth of all the prophecies along with it. The beauty of the MORALS, and the benevolence and purity of the CHARACTER OF CHRIST are granted. The TENDENCY of the religion to promote human happiness is avowed by all legislators and rulers. The supernatural PROPAGATION of Christianity may be established from Gibbon's own objections. How is it, then, that the opponents of Revelation are thus inconsistent? How is it that they are thus compelled to bear testimony in favour of Christianity? Does it not prove that they are not satisfied with their own arguments, and that their consciences cannot repose on the reasonings they have framed? Christian writers never act thus. We never make concessions to infidelity: we never admit at one time what we deny at another. The case is plain. Those concessions arise from occasional convictions of truth felt and expressed, though contrary to the general stream of the unbeliever's feelings. It is thus that vicious men often bear testimony in favour of virtue, especially at the near approach of death; but virtuous men never bear testimony in favour of vice.⁶

And then, with these concessions contrast the bitter invectives which, at other times, infidelity employs against Christianity, its ministers, its doctrines, its precepts. Observe the rancour, the peculiar irritation, the deadly malignity which mark their writings. They seem to avenge a personal quarrel. No buffoonery is too coarse, no ridicule too keen, no sarcasm is too bitter for such a purpose. Instead of reasoning, confused and fallacious as it may be, they give you clamour; instead of facts, calumny; instead of calm argumentation, personal reproach; instead of deliberation and

⁶ Fuller.

the fear of deciding amiss, rashness and precipitation of judgment. Such objections carry their own refutation with them.

4. Add to this **THE SHIFTING AND VERSATILITY** of these objections in different ages, and by different classes of writers. The infidelity of each age varies from the preceding. The objections relied on now, will be abandoned a few years hence. What Herbert admitted in the seventeenth century as the notices of our reason under all circumstances, Paine, in the eighteenth, spurns and rejects. What was scorned by Hobbes and Shaftesbury, is now tacitly allowed to be right and just. Infidelity is compelled to wear the garb of Christianity, and appear under the form of Neologism⁷ and Socinianism. Against this variable and inconsistent opposition, Christianity presents her uniform and unchangeable testimony, her authenticity, her divine authority, her internal excellency. She is defended now, as she was in the days of Justin Martyr and Lactantius. She has the uniformity of truth.

Such, then, being the contradiction of the objections raised against Christianity, we need not regard them with alarm. It would be madness to allow such cavils to disturb our faith. No, my young friends! You have first taken, as you ought, a direct view of the positive evidences; you have found every part abundantly furnished with testimonies; you have seen the inward excellency of the religion. To you, then, the speculative error falls harmless of itself. You have laid the proper foundation; your mind reposes upon it; and you can now deal with the objections, which might have perplexed you, if you had been unfur-

⁷ This new doctrine, as its name assumes, scarcely disguises its infidelity. It attempts to explain away, not only the capital doctrines of Christianity, with Socinianism, but all miraculous power—every thing, in short, peculiar to revelation.

nished with this knowledge. Your Christian hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast;"^s and you will never be persuaded to desert your port in order to venture, at the call of human rashness, on the wild sea of endless reasonings. No; if sceptical doubts intrude into the mind, you will fall back on the positive facts and practical benefits of Christianity; you will let conscience reply; you will not be caught in the thin web of a treacherous enemy; but being furnished with a solid, practical persuasion of Christianity, you will burst at once the dangerous delusions, and come forth to liberty and peace.

If we had nothing else to state in answer to the objections of infidelity, this would be more than enough. They are not only inadmissible in themselves, but, when they are looked into, they are found to be contradictory with each other. But we proceed yet further; chiefly for the sake of the young, into whose minds the bold assertions and cavils of the sceptic may at times be injected; and we show,

III. That these objections ARE FRIVOLOUS IN THEMSELVES, AND MANIFESTLY SPRING FROM THE PRIDE AND IGNORANCE OF THE HUMAN MIND.

I can scarcely bring myself to classify these miserable reasonings, even with the purpose of showing how vain and weak they are as advanced against Christianity.

Let us first, however, look at those which are **TRIFLING** in themselves; then at such as spring especially from the **PRIDE** of the human heart; and lastly, at those which arise chiefly from **IGNORANCE** of what Christianity is, and of the facts connected with it.

1. For what can be more **TRIFLING** in themselves than petty critical or scientific objections on the di-

^s Heb. vi. 19.

mensions of the ark ; on slight variations in genealogies ; on points of chronological minuteness ; on circumstances in the lives of the patriarchs ; on the quotations in the New Testament from the Old ; on the diversities in the narrative of the four gospels ; or the various readings in the manuscripts ; on the supposed contradictions between geological theories and the Mosaic account of the creation ; on the judgments inflicted by the Almighty on guilty nations, by means of the Jewish people ? A thousand things such as these—what are they but trifling, petty, microscopic atoms floating in the sun-beams, compared with the gigantic mass of evidences, external and internal, by which Christianity is sustained ? In books of such antiquity and diversity ; in the accounts of usages and manners which have passed away for ages ; in documents, designed for the whole world, and for men of every class and in every period of time, these difficulties might be expected to occur ; they are the mere dust in the balance ; they are matters which sound criticism explains ; which further knowledge of ancient manners elucidates ; which every new commentator lessens by more enlarged means of information ; and which have been every one shown to admit of a satisfactory answer. To dwell on such points, is as frivolous and absurd, as for a prisoner, condemned to death, to criticize minutely the language of the pardon granted him by his sovereign, at the moment when gratitude and joy should overwhelm every other feeling.

2. But, to pass from this first class, what shall we say to the great speculative objections which involve, indeed, the deepest and most momentous questions, but which, as they affect the evidences of Christianity, are obviously the dictates of HUMAN PRIDE AND PRESUMPTION ? For what are difficulties raised about the guilt and corruption of man, and the incomprehensibility of the Christian mysteries, but a confession

of a proud curiosity, which would pry into secrets which God has not revealed, and which Christianity avows to be beyond her design to unfold?

Men urge against Christianity, the existence of moral evil, and the statements of Scripture about the depravity and corruption of man. We acknowledge the impenetrable difficulties to our finite understandings. But does not Christianity profess that her scheme is only partially revealed; that the practical bearings of it are, indeed, clearly made out to guide man in his duties; but that the whole reasons of the Almighty in his permission of evil, in his dealings with his rational and accountable creatures, are not revealed, much less submitted to human judgment and opinion? What, then—must we again remind young persons of the limited faculties of man, and his inability to comprehend the designs of the infinite God? What, then—is it not enough that the Revelation declares that “the Judge of all the earth will do right;”^a that at the last great assize he will reconcile all the apparent inequalities in his providential dealings, and display his holy character in all its perfection? What! are there not sufficient indications of the divine goodness and mercy in the scheme of Revelation, though some parts of man’s condition, and some of the causes of things, are not discovered to us? What! can a child, brought up by a kind and considerate parent, discern proofs enough of his love and wisdom, though some of his restraints, and many of his commands, appear harsh to his selfishness and passions; and shall not man, the child of a heavenly parent, acknowledge the numberless instances of God’s goodness and mercy, though he cannot understand why he was made with such and such powers, and placed in such and such relations? Nay, is not the fallacy of the sceptic’s argument, with respect to the

^a Gen. xviii. 25.

character of the Almighty, infinitely more glaring, than the fallacy of the child's argument would be, if he concluded against the kindness and wisdom of his earthly father!

Or conceive the same thing in another light. Here is a complicated machine invented by one of unquestionably superior ability and integrity—the **END** to be ultimately accomplished by it, is so simple as to be understood by those of the lowest capacity. We cannot, however, follow out in every instance, the nature of the machinery, merely through our want of understanding; but we are still assured by the maker, that all is framed in the best manner, but that the effect is yet very imperfectly produced. Surely this assurance, backed with demonstrative evidence of success in a variety of instances that fell within the level of our capacity, would remove all shadow of doubt from every reasonable mind. Now that God is wise and good, and that the proceedings of his government must be wise and good, all acknowledge who admit the perfections of the one Almighty God. Revelation also teaches us the **END** which he will ultimately bring out. We find ourselves lost, however, in the mysterious conduct of the means he uses. But we see evidently that we understand not the sum of things; and experience tells us that nothing is more fallible than our judgment in these matters. While, then, we have undoubted proofs that the Revelation is from God—that the machinery is of divine formation—we cannot rationally distrust the perfection of his moral government, however incomprehensible to us.¹⁰

But why do I thus expose the futility of this objection? For wherefore is it urged at all against Christianity? Christianity did not produce the actual condition of man. Christianity did not occasion the fall of our nature. Christianity did not introduce

¹⁰ See Milner against Gibbon, p. 216.

moral evil. We have already made this remark.¹¹ We make it again. The misery and guilt of man is a state of things which actually exists, whether Christianity be true or not. Man is actually in this condition under the natural government of God. Natural religion has to deal with the fact, as much as Christianity. Go then, presumptuous inquirer, and ask of natural religion the solution of your difficulties. Go and demand of the Deist what he has to say of the entrance of moral evil and the amount of disorder and unhappiness now in the world. When he has answered your demand, then come back to Christianity, and she will show you the remedy she has provided for it.

The truth is, such inquiries are beyond and above our faculties. If men allow the being and perfections of God, under whose government this evil exists, they cannot with any show of reason transfer the objection from natural to revealed religion, and make it a pretext for rejecting all the positive evidences of Revelation; especially as this proposes an alleviation, a remedy, a salvation to man, a clue to lead him out of the labyrinth where he must otherwise wander without rescue and without hope. "If in a chain of mercy by which the Almighty draws a race of sinners to himself, the first links be far above out of our sight, and others surrounded with a glory too bright for mortal gaze; shall we on that account refuse to follow its attraction, and choose our own ways and methods of ascending into the presence of the Most High?"¹²

¹¹ Lect. XV.

¹² Bishop Blomfield's Sermons, p. 45.—I add an important remark from another author. "That there are difficulties in the Christian system, every reflecting man will be ready to acknowledge: but then they are either difficulties which admit of an easy solution, or such as arise out of the limited range of our capacities in this infancy of our being; and if we will but condescend to believe that the works of God are as great and marvellous, and his ways as just

I say little on the other branch of this class of objections, the incomprehensibility of the Christian mysteries; for what is the source of all this but the plainest pride and presumption—a pride and presumption yet more inexcusable than that which gave rise to the former topic? There was in that difficulty, a plausible force from the acknowledged facts of man's misery; but to complain of incomprehensibility in the mode of the divine subsistencies in the Holy Trinity, in the incarnation, the atonement, the person and operations of the Holy Spirit, the divine will and

and true, in those things which we do not yet comprehend, as we clearly see to be the case in those that we do, then every rebellious aspiring of a sceptical nature will be quelled, and we shall be contented to wait in humility and faith for those clearer discoveries, which it is reasonable to conclude will form one great source of increased enjoyment to us in a more exalted state of being.

“In the mean time, it is of the first importance, when dwelling upon the difficulties which may be started by sceptics to the Christian Revelation, to recollect that most of these difficulties apply with equal force to every system of Deism that has been or can be framed. The great difference between the two cases is this, that although each system has its difficulties inevitable to creatures placed in circumstances of comparative ignorance, there is on the side of Christianity a mass of evidence, clear, convincing, and incontrovertible, to prove that it is a system framed by Infinite Benevolence, for the highest purposes of human happiness: there is practical proof, that, by its influence on the human mind, millions have been reclaimed from immorality; and there is an absolute certainty, from a survey of its principles, that if we could conceive them to have their full influence upon the counsels of nations, and upon the conduct of individuals, the reign of sin, the source of all misery, would be extinguished, and earth would almost wear the aspect of heaven. In the other case, Deism has to encounter most of the difficulties, and is at the same time utterly devoid of any of the evidences of Christianity: It is all hopeless uncertainty, and dreary, shivering speculation.”—*Harford's Account of T. Paine*—to which admirable and authentic narrative, drawn from original documents and the testimonies of eye-witnesses, this and the succeeding Lecture are much indebted.

purposes in election, the union of man's free agency with God's gracious influences upon the heart, is at once to make ourselves wiser than the Almighty. Undoubtedly, many parts of these doctrines are involved to us in mystery—but they are proposed to us as such ; the great mystery of godliness is only unfolded as to certain practical uses. Probably our faculties are incapable of comprehending more than has been revealed. An insect in the drawer of a cabinet, is more capable of weighing the conduct and estimating all the counsels of princes, than we are capable of weighing the conduct and estimating the counsels of the infinite God.¹³ Christianity hides not her mysteries: she avows them. She says, she has truth, but truth veiled ; that the secret things of her doctrine, like those of nature, will not be entirely manifested till we come to the region of full and perfect light. She says, God is good, but incomprehensibly good ; wise, but incomprehensibly wise ; intelligent, but of an incomprehensible understanding. You tell a peasant that the sun, which he sees rise, draw towards the meridian, decline towards the west, and at length disappear, is yet immoveable in the centre of the universe ; you say to him that this earth on which he stands so firmly, turns about its axis with a frightful rapidity. He cannot comprehend you ; and you attribute his incredulity to its true cause, his ignorance.¹⁴ It is so with the Christian mysteries. In God they are “ all light, neither is there any darkness at all ; ”¹⁵ though, as it respects us, they are obscure and incomprehensible. But as the peasant, if possessed of the least modesty and humility, would believe the facts of the natural world on the testimony of the united learning and moral integrity of men of all nations, best capable of examining them ; so much more will the Christian, receiving a divine Revelation

¹³ Locke.¹⁴ Frayssinous.¹⁵ 1 John i. 5.

on its authentic proofs, admit the Revelation itself as the authority for the mysteries which it contains. Such objections, then, are, as it respects Christianity, utterly frivolous.

3. But we pass to the third class of objections which spring from MERE IGNORANCE OF WHAT CHRISTIANITY is, what it proposes to effect, the manner of its operations, its proper province, and the history of its actual influence in all ages. And, here, why should I reply to the oft-refuted objections to the dangerous tendency of the doctrine of justification by faith in the merits of the Son of God, when the whole Bible, and the testimony of all competent witnesses, show it to be the immediate source of gratitude, obedience, holiness, joy? Why should I repel the charge of gloomy and monastic and mean virtues being attached to Christianity, when the slightest acquaintance with the morals of the gospel will show its lovely and benignant character, its freedom from every appearance of austerity, its amiable and sympathizing and consoling spirit? Or, again, why should I refute the objection framed on the ground of the persecutions and wars of which Christianity has been said to be the cause! For where is the spirit of persecution to be found in the New Testament? Is it in the sermon on the Mount? Is it in the delineation of charity in the Epistle to the Corinthians, or in the enumeration of the lovely virtues in the 12th of that to the Romans? Who, I ask, have in all ages been the authors of wars and persecutions, Christians or their oppressors? Did Christianity persecute Herod, or Herod Christianity? Did the Christians of the first three centuries raise wars and persecutions against the Roman emperors, or the Roman emperors against the Christians? And if corrupt bodies of men have in later ages made a pretext of Christianity for kindling wars or exciting persecutions, what was the cause? Was it Christianity, or the want of Chris-

tianity? Was it the pure and humble doctrine of the gospel preached by the Reformers, which excited the wars of that period; or the fierce and implacable spirit of men void of Christianity and filled with secular ambition and pride? Where is the precept of Christianity which is not peaceful and benignant? Where the spot in which pure Christianity has been planted, without bringing its own spirit of forgiveness with it and subduing the angry passions of man?

And what are the variety of opinions and the divisions among Christians—another topic of invective with unbelievers—but generally immaterial differences of judgment, upon subordinate points, springing from the weakness of human reason? All true Christians are united upon every thing vital—every thing that relates to the main doctrines, the chief duties and the lovely temper of the gospel—all are united in humiliation before God for sin, in reliance on the grace and merits of Jesus Christ, and in the necessity of holiness of heart and life. Their varieties of opinion on the details and expositions of truth, and on matters of external discipline, are entirely lost in the immense importance of the points on which they speak with one heart and one mouth, to the praise of that Saviour whom the gospel has revealed.

I will not dwell on the objection raised upon the little influence which Christianity has upon its followers, because this again is an ebullition of pure ignorance—it rests on the gross mistake of confounding nominal with real Christians—it proceeds on the idea that men are Christians, though they are merely worldly, proud professors of that holy doctrine, with the name of a religion which they understand not, regard not, follow not in any one branch of its principles or commands. To quote men who have never taken the prescribed medicine, as proofs of the want of virtue in the medicine itself, is contrary to reason and common sense.

But, then, the Christian religion wants universality and greater clearness in its evidences—say the objectors, in the last place. Here, also, men's ignorance is the true source of the mistake! Are they any judges of the clearness and force of the evidences, which they have never examined?—for if they had examined them, they could not overlook their immense force, and turn aside to speculate on the matters which we have been refuting. Have they ever spent one hour in weighing, with serious and candid minds, the mass of evidences which Christianity produces? Have they not, on the contrary, neglected, passed over, despised our body of proofs, and flown off to vain reasonings, which can only bewilder the understanding and harden the heart? And what ignorance is it of the whole design of Christianity, to suppose that man may prescribe to the Almighty the degree of clearness which should attend the testimonies of Revelation! It is enough if the proofs are sufficient to satisfy a humble, sincere inquirer. To satisfy others is impossible. To make the evidences irresistible, would go to undermine all the moral agency of man, would be contrary to his estate of probation, would act upon him mechanically and forcibly, and destroy his moral and accountable nature. Yet the evidences, after all, are, I was going to say, irresistible—that is, they are so numerous, so powerful, so various, so attractive, they arise from so many quarters, they address in so many parts man's reason and affections, that to a fair and impartial student they are demonstrative, overwhelming, irresistible.

And as to the want of universality in the religion, what is the cause? Is it not the torpor and ingratitude of those who possess, but do not spread, its blessings; who neglect the last and most solemn command of its divine Founder, who act against its genuine spirit of diffusion, who are tame, feeble, and declining in their Christianity, instead of being bold,

ardent, and persevering? What was the spirit of the church in its early age, but dissemination? What was the last thing that withered before the blighting selfishness of the dark ages, but dissemination? What has distinguished the revival of pure Christianity, but the zeal of missions?

And how, then, can the want of universality be charged as an objection upon our religion? It is designed to be universal, it is calculated to be so in all its parts, its followers are bound by every motive to render it so.

What reasons, unknown to man, there may be for Almighty God's permitting the present slow and limited range of this mighty blessing, it is not for us to say. Man's ignorance is here the best check on the rash impetuosity of our minds. We see in the natural world, that men's faculties, powers, advantages, are most unequally distributed. We see that benefits, and discoveries, and inventions of the most beneficial kind, are limited in their circuit. The most valuable discoveries in medicine, for instance, have been made only of late years, and are still confined to a few nations. To find, therefore, the benefits of the Christian dispensation extended only to certain nations, and not reaching to others, is no more valid as an objection to Christianity, than a similar order of things is to the natural government of God.¹⁶

"The work of God is begun," says Bishop Horsley, "is going on, and will unquestionably be carried to its perfection. The spirit of Christianity is gaining more and more of an ascendancy, and God's good work is tending to its consummation by that progress, by which, from the very nature of the means employed, the business must be expected to proceed. The means are not such as he might be expected to put in use, if his omnipotence alone were regarded,

¹⁶ Butler.

but they are such as are consistent with the free agency of man ; such as are adapted to the nature of man as a rational and moral agent, and adapted to the justice and wisdom and mercy of God in his dealings with such a creature. God's power is unquestionably competent to the instantaneous abolition of all moral evil, by the annihilation, at a single stroke, of the whole troop of rebellious angels and the whole race of sinful men, and the production of new creatures in their room. God's power is competent to the speedy abolition of moral evil, by the sudden execution of severe judgments on wicked nations, or sinful individuals. But God willeth not the death of a sinner ; he seeks our obedience to his will founded less on fear than love. He abstains, therefore, from these summary, abrupt, coercive measures, and he employs no other means than the preaching of the gospel, that is, no other means than those of persuasion and argument, invitation and threatening. It is very obvious that ages must elapse before these means can produce their full effect. The progress of the work will not only be gradual, but liable to temporary interruptions ; so that at times it may seem, not only to stand still, but even to go backward, as often as particular circumstances in the affairs of the world draw away the attention of men from the doctrines of the gospel, or raise up extraordinary opposition of their passions to its precepts. Instead of taking offence at the slow progress, we should rely on the promise of the prophetic word, and set ourselves to consider what may be done on our part, and what God may expect we should do, for the furtherance of his work and the removal of hindrances."¹⁷

Thus vain and frivolous are the objections of infidelity when we come to consider them, which we have the rather done, because they are of the same nature

¹⁷ Horsley, Sermon xl.—a reference to one or two sentences of it is made, p. 201.

with the corrupt suggestions of the fallen heart of man, a resistance to which is a main characteristic of the wise and sincere Christian, whilst he that yields to them becomes the unbeliever. But that Christianity should be open to such difficulties, is indeed what might be expected when God, the infinite Creator, makes known a part of his ways to man, a feeble, corrupt, and perverse creature. We observe, therefore—

IV. That THESE OBJECTIONS ARE, UPON THE WHOLE, ONLY TRIALS OF OUR SINCERITY AND SUBMISSION OF HEART TO GOD, AND GO TO CONFIRM RATHER THAN WEAKEN THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

For it is a part of our probation in this world, that we should be subjected to the consideration of difficulties, which we may make the occasion of objection and rebellion of heart, if we please, but which are designed only to put to the proof our sincerity and submission of mind to our circumstances and duties. To understand fully all the parts of the Christian system, might require, for any thing we can tell, divine capacities. Mystery is a necessary attendant upon the being and perfections of God, in the view of a finite creature like man. Similar difficulties and objections to those which men think they see in Revelation, they think they see in God's moral government of the world. Now if the very same sort of obscurities, grounds of irritation, partial light, limited range of influence, contradiction to preconceived expectations, unlooked for position of things—matters beyond and above our comprehension—do actually take place in a system of things which we acknowledge to be divine ; then similar grounds of objection are no sound arguments against the Christian Revelation. The same objections as men bring against Christianity, may be brought against natural religion ; and if they are of

no force in the one case, so neither are they in the other.¹⁸

It may, therefore, be the trial most appropriate to our state of probation, that some of the evidences of Christianity should be thought liable to objections, which, though trifling in themselves, when discussed, yet may puzzle an inexperienced mind; and may carry it off from truth and holiness.

The state of things as to the evidences of Christianity, is precisely what it is as to many of the most important truths of natural religion. They do not all lie upon the surface, some of them are open to many exceptions, they are collected only from the whole of a series of considerations, are of little weight unless men will be serious, devout, attentive; they are not seen, if men will begin on the side of objections.¹⁹

Indeed, the human mind is so constituted, or is so weakened since the fall, that moral and religious truth can be received in no other way than by beginning with positive evidences, and overlooking objections and difficulties. The mind can always frame subtleties, perceive obstacles, present plausible sophisms. Something may always be said by a perverse or weak or over-curious disputant. But why did I say, in moral

¹⁸ Butler.

¹⁹ We see, in fact, from the Scriptures, that objections were ever made against truth. The history of the Jews is a history of the cavils and difficulties advanced by that people against Moses and Samuel, and the other prophets. The gospels abound with the discourses of our Lord against the objections of the Jews of his day. The Acts and the Epistles are much engaged in answering or silencing the vain disputations of men. The language of St. Peter, in the passage which I read as my text, is conclusive on the same subject. *The scoffers are there described, first, in their moral state—they walk after their own lusts; and then in their objections against Christianity—and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they did from the creation of the world.* All this goes to prove that vain reasonings are to be expected as a trial of our faith.

and religious questions?—in every question, in matters even of conscience, as we before observed, the fruitful mind of man can excite a host of imaginations. It is one of our primary duties to Almighty God, to subdue these treacherous risings of our minds, to view a great question like Christianity, in its right light, to begin with plain matters of fact in its historical proofs, to leave difficulties and speculative reasonings till the student, being well furnished with knowledge and imbued with the spirit of Christianity, is able to cope with them safely.

Thus, on the whole, these objections are clearly only trials of our sincerity and submission of heart to God. They are really in favour of the Evidences of our faith. That Christianity should seem open to them, is an argument that it is a part of the same divine government which lies open to the same objections in the natural order of the world. That men should be exposed to them, is an argument to prove the divine origin of the Revelation; all is consistent and harmonious in the manifestations of the same glorious God to man.

And when the nature of the reasonings against Revelation is considered, the argument turns yet more entirely in favour of the religion they would oppose.

For we may be sure that every thing that can be urged against so holy and sublime a Revelation as Christianity, has been diligently sought for. We have all that can be said. If then the objections of unbelievers amount to nothing more than a certain number of speculative difficulties, which might as easily be raised against natural religion, as against Revelation; if it appears that these objections are bottomed upon mere airy opinions of the human mind; if, besides the vanity of the objections in themselves, they are directed to a wrong point, and are altogether inadmissible, so long as the mass of historical evidences remains untouched; if, moreover, they

are full of contradictions and inconsistencies; and after all, are frivolous and futile,—if all this be so, then I say, such objections rather confirm than weaken the Christian evidences—then I say, it is no small argument in favour of Christianity, that after two thousand years, nothing solid, nothing tangible, nothing resting upon facts, should be substantiated against it.

Nay, I assert further, that such vapid objections turn completely against those who advance them, because, whilst they make nothing against the evidences of Christianity, which they do not venture to touch, and as little against its contents, which they cannot shake, they leave all the facts unaccounted for which have existed before the eyes of men, in all ages, and stare every man full in the face, in the present. Infidelity, whilst framing speculations against Christianity, leaves her own citadel undefended. We take her up on her own ground. We ask her, supposing her objections to be granted, and Christianity to be accounted not of divine authority, Whence the religion arose? Who were the authors of it? What was its origin? Who was its founder? What gave success to the unarmed apostles? What made the weakest and most despised of causes to triumph over the most powerful and most honoured? What produced the greatest revolution in the human mind which the world ever witnessed,—the overthrow of heathenism, and the establishment of Christianity? What has preserved the religion, and carried on its triumphs to the present hour? What has infused into its inward frame-work such an adaptation to the state and wants of man—such a sublimity of doctrine—such a purity of morals—such a beneficial tendency? What accounts for the pre-eminent holiness and loveliness of the character of Christ? What gives the religion the actual glory and efficacy of which every humble inquirer may make a trial upon himself, and in his own case?

The credulity of unbelief is the most extraordinary of all phenomena in the moral world. It can repose on mere speculative objections, in the teeth of history and experience ; and yet it can believe all the absurdities and impossibilities which the consequences of rejecting Revelation bring with them ! It can reject all the mighty credentials of Revelation, on the footing of imaginary difficulties ; and yet it can believe that Christianity had no founder, no origin, no cause, no author—but was the product of chance and accident !

No ! such objections prove the truth of the religion which they impugn ; such reasonings go to confirm the evidences they would destroy. The weapons of unbelief are thus wrested from its feeble grasp, and are turned against itself. Our foes fall by their own arms. Infidelity cannot stand, if left to its own cause. Its suicidal hand inflicts the mortal blow. Never was there such a case as that of infidelity exhibited before the eyes of mankind. Let the young and candid inquirer judge.

Christianity comes forth surrounded with facts, historical proofs, an apparatus of magnificent miracles, a series of prophecies fulfilling before the eyes of mankind, a supernatural propagation and preservation of the gospel in the world, prominent and obvious good effects as to every thing that touches human happiness : Infidelity comes forth with petty objections, speculative reasonings, vain imaginations. Christianity invites you to believe on far stronger grounds of faith than men are governed by every day : Infidelity tempts you to disbelieve, on grounds which no single human being ever acted upon in common life. Christianity draws her arguments not from mere human reasonings, but from God, from facts, from experience, from the plainest dictates of moral duty, from proofs tangible and level to our capacity of judging : Infidelity draws her objections from the corrupt heart of man,

from theory, from conjecture, from the plainest contradictions to common sense, from reasonings out of our reach and beyond our capacities. Christianity calls on us to obey her Revelation, as the remedy of our maladies, and a stupendous salvation from eternal death ; and makes all her discoveries and mysteries intelligible and simple in respect to our duties and wants : Infidelity calls us to speculation and presumption ; denies the malady ; concerns herself with finding fault with the mysteries which she will not apply aright, and leaves man without salvation, without guidance, without consolation, without hope—a wanderer in the wilderness of the world.

Such is the real character of Infidel objections, or rather, such are the arguments in favour of Christianity, which objections so weak and unreasonable furnish.

What, then, practically, is the hold which such objections have of men ? How is it that they still prevail with so many ? Whence is it that infidelity, with such a miserable destitution of argument, still triumphs so widely amongst the young ? The answer is, that the objections fix themselves in unfurnished and vain minds ; that they follow upon vicious habits ; that they are the judicial infliction of the provoked Spirit of God ; that they carry off those who have no real hold of Christianity ; that they are the great stragem of the spiritual adversary ; that they are the most fatal product of the corrupt and proud reason of a fallen creature.

Let us, in conclusion, touch on these topics.

I. I say these wretched sophisms of infidelity FIX THEMSELVES IN UNFURNISHED AND VAIN MINDS. Curiosity, admiration of mere talents, the love of novelty, the prurient desire to know what unbelievers have to say, open the mind to the arts of the scoffer. Men are unfurnished with the full knowledge of the

grounds of their faith, and are unequal for a contest with subtle disputants. There is no saying what havoc objections make when young people are not called to consider them; when they presumptuously, and from mere curiosity, allow them to dwell in the mind; when they begin on the side of these speculations, instead of the side of the positive evidences of Christianity. Avoid, therefore, playing with the snare. Dread exposing yourselves to "the pestilence which walketh in darkness." Tamper not with temptation. This is my first caution.

II. Shun, in the next place, THOSE VICES WHICH PREPARE FOR INFIDEL OBJECTIONS. Sensuality is the mother and nurse of unbelief. The proud, profligate youth finds Christianity stand in his way. He says, "Give me reasons against the Bible; and if there are none, I will invent some." His unbelief is the fruit of his passions and of his intellectual and moral rebellion against God. It is not the conviction of satisfied research, but the haste and presumption of an uninformed and vicious mind. We need not wonder that profligate persons of great natural talents fall into infidelity; for the main objection is antecedent to the production of any evidence; and it is not to be expected that they should have made themselves masters of the merits of the case.⁷⁰ A natural consequence of the continued violation or disregard of any law, is a doubt or denial of its authority. Shun, therefore, O young man, the vices which would make you desire to find some hold against Christianity. Reverence conscience—imitate the examples of your virtuous Christian friends—follow your Bible as the guide of life; and your objections will presently vanish.

III. PROVOKE not, in the third place, I would intreat you—provoke not the GOOD SPIRIT OF GOD

⁷⁰ Shuttleworth's Sermons.

TO DEPART FROM YOU, and give you up to judicial blindness and obduracy of heart. If you go on in vain curiosity and idle intercourse with the scoffer; if you live in vice and moral evils contrary to known duty—fear lest the blessed guide and sanctifier of man should be grieved, and should depart from you. I address you as the disciple of the Christian religion; I address you as one who knows the divine agent and author of grace; I address you as one who knows the ordinary dealings of the Almighty, whose “Spirit doth not always strive with man;”²¹ but who left Pharaoh to his impenitent heart; who consigned the Jews to obduracy and unbelief; and who threatens all who “love not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, with being given up to a strong delusion, to believe a lie.”²² If once given up of God, any objections will avail to turn you from Christianity; the weakest sophisms will be too strong for you; the mightiest host of facts and historical evidences will appear of no force in your view; you will go on from worse to worse—from negligence to scorn; from speculative to practical unbelief; from the trifling and indevout, to the daring and presumptuous temper, which defies God, disowns the Saviour, and rushes madly upon eternity.

IV. In order to avoid any approach to this fatal end, SEE THAT YOU HAVE A REAL HOLD OF CHRISTIANITY IN ITS SUBSTANTIAL BLESSINGS—in its actual efficacy upon your heart and life. Speculative objections have little force to perplex the practical and spiritually-minded Christian. He has the shield of faith, which quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. On the other hand, he who has never felt religion, and known its power, has a great disadvantage in coping with an ingenious disputant. His heart hav-

²¹ Gen. vi. 3.

²² 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

ing never been affected and blessed with Christianity, he holds by it slightly ; he rather hangs upon it, than embraces it ; he retains it merely by an hereditary prejudice : he sees no reason why opinions and sentiments should be thought of so great consequence ; he thinks, perhaps, all opinions immaterial. Christianity has never given him an actual power against his passions ; Christianity has never raised, and blessed, and consoled his heart in affliction ; Christianity has never brought him to pardon, peace, and a new and heavenly life ; Christianity is to him little more than a code of restraints, with certain religious ceremonies attached to them. Thus sitting loose to all that is vital in his religion, what wonder is it, if, when infidelity spreads its snares, he is taken ? Let the young, then, seek for the practical influences of Christianity ; let them make a trial of its promised grace ; let them know it as **THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION**—and scientific reasonings will never overthrow their strong and well-grounded faith. For,

V. They will soon discover that the objections of infidelity are, in truth, **ONE OF THE GREAT STRATAGEMS OF SATAN, THE SPIRITUAL ADVERSARY**. They learn from Revelation the power, the malice, the artifice of that apostate spirit. They know that, from the period of his successful temptation of our first parents, he has been systematically opposing **THE SEED OF THE WOMAN**, who was so long promised, and who, at length, appeared to destroy the works of the devil. They know that this deadly adversary has instigated, in different ages, various instruments for hardening the heart of man, and defeating the purposes of redemption. He worked by heathen idolatry, so long as that could be sustained ; he worked by superstition and spiritual bondage, during the dark ages ; he works now by **SPECULATIVE OBJECTIONS**, the abuse of literature, a confidence in talents, education, and the reasoning

powers of man. Behold, then, in this one consideration, the whole web of infidel speculations unravelled. No wonder these vain and futile fabrications, though possessing little force in themselves against positive facts, though directed to a wrong point and inadmissible, though inconsistent and contradictory and frivolous, the manifest product of human pride and ignorance ; no wonder they still deceive so many—for the secret is now laid open. The whole system is a part of Satan's agency with the intent to ruin man. They are temptations, not reasons ; the shafts of the wicked one, not the armour of truth.

Resist, then, these assaults of your spiritual adversary ; cherish not the imaginations which subserve your own destruction ; treat them as you would the robber who should enter your dwelling, to spoil it of your most valuable possessions ; quench the suggestions of the arch-deceiver, and open your hearts to the fair and manly operations of conscience and truth.

VI. Finally, consider these vain objections as THE MOST DEADLY PRODUCT OF THE CORRUPT AND PROUD REASON OF A FALLEN CREATURE. This is the sum of the present Lecture, which I must hasten to conclude. Objections are the offspring of man's corrupt and depraved nature, where all the faculties of body and soul are disturbed and weakened. They form an unhealthy atmosphere around this lower world. Christianity comes to remedy the evil. It calls for the humiliation of the understanding before the revealed will of God, and the subjection of the passions and appetites to the revealed precepts of God. It is as much a branch of moral duty to believe, when God grants such evidences as he has done in the case of Christianity, as it is to restrain the inferior appetites, when the same almighty Lord has issued his prohibitions against vice and immorality. To re-

ject interposing doubts, to turn away from objections, to silence vain curiosity, to rebuke presumptuous daring, to check the roving imaginations of the intellect; to call in the aid of grace for this end; to quench the suggestions of Satan by the blessed aid of the Holy Spirit; to enter more and more into the practical experience of religion—this is the wisdom of man. This purifies the atmosphere, or guards us from its destructive qualities. This teaches us to consider all speculative objections which rise in the mind against the evidences or the matter of Christianity, as the noxious vapours generated in a prurient soil—as the product of reason weakened and perverted—as the arts of Satan operating upon a sinful imagination.

Cling, then, to Christianity as your light and protection. She throws a safeguard and barrier around you in a dark world. She detects the sophistry of infidelity, and sends you unhurt to pursue your salvation, in the midst of the errors and confusions of this probationary state—she guards you from the unhealthy vapours which collect around, and prevents the explosions which would otherwise prove fatal to you.

Yes; as the miner is furnished with the **LAMP OF SAFETY**, and obtains light and security when he descends the subterranean cavern, where the fire-damp might explode and bury him in destruction; and as, guided by his **LAMP**, he is protected from the fatal dangers of combustion, pursues his calling, and returns to his home and his family and the light of day, unhurt.

So does Christianity furnish you with **THE TRUE SAFETY LAMP**, when called to descend the caverns and depths of Satan, in this benighted world—so does Christianity neutralize and carry off the mischievous effects of infidelity—so does she shield your

mind and surround you with a defence, which, whilst it affords you light and security for your work, preserves you from the fatal dangers to which an unprotected heart might be exposed, and sends you up again in safety, to the ordinary discharge of your Christian calling in the cheering light of day.

LECTURE XXII.

THE LIVES AND DEATHS OF INFIDELS COMPARED WITH THOSE OF SINCERE CHRISTIANS.

PSALM xxxvii. 35—37.

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.

HAVING shown the vanity and futility of the speculative objections raised against Christianity, we proceed now to consider the lives and deaths of those who advance them. For if the general character of infidels should be found to be utterly inconsistent with truth and sincerity in a religious inquiry, and the general character of sincere Christians entirely consistent with them; we shall have an additional proof that objections against the Bible are the mere offspring of human corruption, and that the Christian faith is indeed of God.

“By their fruits ye shall know them,” is an adage not only of revealed, but of natural religion. We shall bring before you, then, the two classes; those who give way to speculative infidel objections; and

those who devoutly believe and obey the Christian Revelation. We shall summons the body of sceptics who have imbibed and followed out into practice the cavils of infidelity ; and contrast them with the body of sincere Christians, who have received and followed out into practice the doctrines of the Bible. We shall not select doubtful, ambiguous cases which hover between faith and unbelief, but decisive characters on each side—the thorough infidel, and the thorough Christian ; and we shall contrast them as to **THE TENOR OF THEIR LIVES ; their WRITINGS AND PUBLIC LABOURS ; and their DEATHS AND PREPARATION for an eternal state of being.**

Let us,

I. Contrast the two classes as to THE TENOR OF THEIR LIVES.

In doing this let us consider their respective maintenance of their common principles of morals and religion—their discharge of the duties of domestic and social life—and their measure of benevolence and goodwill to their fellow-creatures.

1. Let us contrast the infidel with the true Christian, as to the **MAINTENANCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND RELIGION HELD BY THEM IN COMMON.** I say, held by them in common, because I wish to concede all that is asked. Allow the infidel his professed principles of natural religion ; and then contrast the manner in which he maintains them with the conduct of the sincere believer.

And here a very few words will suffice. We have already shown the absence of any thing like a candid and devout temper in the inquiries of infidels,¹ and their inability to sustain or restore the principles of natural religion when unaided by Revelation.² We have noticed likewise that entire want of any real intention

¹ Lecture II.

² Lecture III.

of carrying into effect the principles of morals, which marks their conduct.³ The fact is, they seem to have no principles, except those of a general scepticism and contempt of all religion. Grant them all they ask in a moment of controversy, and trace out afterwards the way in which they maintain their principles, and you will see that they leave no foundation to build upon. They profess to believe in one living and true God, to admit some of his essential and moral attributes—his omnipresence and omniscience, and his government of the world—they profess to hold the moral and accountable nature of man, his obligations to virtue and piety, to the worship of his Maker, and to the duties of repentance, prayer, and thanksgiving, for the divine benefits. They profess to admit the principles of morals as held by the Heathen sages, and improved by modern philosophy. But the very enumeration of these topics has the appearance of sarcasm, when applied to infidelity. Contradictions without end, as we mentioned in our last Lecture,⁴ seem purposely scattered in all they say, as it were with the view of sapping all the elements of morals and religion. They now appear for an instant to favour Christianity; and now, by opposing all religion generally, they show that their hostility is merely a feeling against it, as included in the common mass. They are continually making efforts to oblige themselves to think after a certain fashion, which violates conscience, and those remains of natural light which nothing can altogether obliterate from the heart of man, whilst a real fear of the other side is still lurking within. The infidel maintains little more, in point of principle, than a vague knowledge of God, adopted from a blind deference to the public sentiment, and a general profession of the obligation of virtue, to spare the pains of examination, or from fear of making himself too sure

³ Lecture XVI.⁴ Lecture XXI.

about it. Where is there a single example of the essential principles of religion and virtue being really and *bonâ fide* maintained in the face of the world, by infidels? There are many nominal Christians, indeed, who sink down into natural religion from want of acquaintance with the peculiarities of their faith; but where is the example of an unbeliever acting up to his own principles, low and general as those principles are?

Now contrast with all this the manner in which every sincere and pious Christian maintains, and maintains at all hazards, and, if needs be, in the face of persecution, exile, and death, the primary elements of religion and morals. In infidelity we find no one principle firm, permanent, uniform; in Christianity it is all principle. Every thing is what you would expect in a true religion—it is first cordially believed, and then boldly and perseveringly avowed.

In the bosom of every real believer, there is not merely a profession of the knowledge of God, his unity, his perfections, his sovereignty, his providence, his law; but there is an honest, straight-forward purpose to maintain them in all their extent and purity.

It is true, that the contrast here is not always immediately visible. The want of principle in infidels is easily seen in their avowed spirit, in their public opinions, in their open blasphemies, in their contradictory statements—the case is notorious. But the inward piety and reverence for God, in the breast of the true Christian, are not so apparent; these are hidden guests, to be judged of cautiously by their appropriate fruit. And the name of Christian being now too often assumed, where there is no one characteristic of real Christianity, it is easy to evade the force of our reasoning. But to those who will examine the subject with candour, the difference is plain. Most of the young persons, whom I have especially in view in these Lectures, know the broad distinction.

between insincere and sincere Christians; and, at the same time, the equally broad distinction between a piety which lies hidden in its principles in the heart, and a scorn and irreligion which provoke observation. I appeal to all who are acquainted with true Christians, whether they do not maintain their principles; whether they do not aim at bringing the great and ever-blessed God into every thing; into all their opinions; into all their habits of thought; all their projects; all their schemes of happiness. They worship him; they pray to him daily in their closets and their families; they dedicate one day in seven to his honour; they bring up their children according to his commandments; they strive to propagate his name throughout the world. The great God of heaven is, with them, restored to that just dominion of which sin had deprived him; he is their glory, their boast, their confidence, the object of their love, and the source of their felicity.

Then, as to the principles of morals, every Christian aims sincerely at maintaining them, with all boldness and honesty, in every possible way, and at every sacrifice. They are not merely acknowledged as a theory, but they are constantly avowed and defended. But why should I repeat the Lecture on Christian morals, or that on the character of our Lord? Suffice it to say, that every element of morals is studiously inculcated and enforced, in proportion as men are real Christians.

In short, the contrast between infidelity and Christianity, in this first sub-division of the inquiry, is between darkness and light, contradiction and harmony, falsehood and truth; unprincipled scepticism, and the holy subjection of faith; a dereliction of all conscientious regard to religion and morals, and the uniform maintenance of both.

What avail, then, the speculative objections of men, with no firm principles to set out with, against men obeying the Christian Revelation, on the footing of

its positive evidences, and maintaining, boldly and perseveringly, all the moral and religious principles which that Revelation elucidates and extends?

2. But let us contrast the lives of infidels and true Christians in another point of view—**THEIR RESPECTIVE DISCHARGE OF THE DUTIES OF DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL LIFE**—that is, from their principles let us proceed to their practice. For, as both classes profess a belief in a righteous governor of the world, it may be expected that those who have truth on their side, will show it by the superior discharge of moral and religious duties; more especially as the question regards such an all-important matter as Christianity, and bears upon duties, acknowledged in common to be binding on man.

Now, it is notorious, from their own avowals, from the memoirs written by themselves and boasted of, from the comparison of documents of all kinds, as well as from our own daily observation, that vanity and pride, selfishness and sensuality, malice and revenge, turbulent tempers and outrageous violations of the domestic virtues; impurity and profligacy of the grossest form; treachery in situations of trust, and want of ordinary honesty and integrity in dealings, discontented and seditious conduct in civil society; contempt of all established order in church and state, connected often with a hatred of their native country; in short, selfish, malignant, debasing, anti-social passions and tendencies have, in all ages and places, distinguished infidelity, as a system.

I speak not of individuals, but of the general class. I appeal to the records of our courts of judicature; I appeal to our statesmen and magistrates; I appeal to the consciences of every one who has known the annals of Europe, and the chief agents in the revolutions which have disturbed it.

There are examples, no doubt, of sober deists, where pride, intellectual pursuits, literary ambition,

or other causes, have predominated over the grosser appetites ; but even in these cases, an avowed licentiousness as to the doctrine of morals ; a ridicule of the milder Christian virtues ; an extreme selfishness and cold-heartedness, as to all the best interests of man, have varied the appearance, without lessening the guilt, of their general conduct.

The lives of sincere and devout Christians are precisely the reverse of all this. Humility, disinterestedness, benevolence, meekness of temper, purity in all the domestic relations, fidelity in situations of trust, honesty and integrity in their dealings, contentment and loyalty in civil society, abstinence from scenes of tumult and disorder, love to their native country ; in short, every virtuous, amiable, self-denying, elevating principle, carried out into act, has, in all places, distinguished true Christians, as a body.

Where shall I turn to take my examples of these general assertions ? On the side of infidelity, I pass by the horrible character of Thomas Paine. I say nothing of his frauds and public dishonesty, his cruelty and selfishness, his avarice and pride, his ingratitude and treachery, his impiety and blasphemies, his licentiousness and adultery ; I pass by his deadly enmity against his own country, his anarchical and revolutionary principles, his determined hostility to all peace, all law, all morals, all religion ; I pass by the disgusting filth and wretchedness and intoxication into which he sunk towards the decline of life—an object of pity and contempt to his own deluded disciples. To dwell on such a character is beneath the sanctity of our subject ; from such a life, what could spring but objections and resistance to the purity of the Christian religion ? In comparison with such turpitude, the lowest measure of real Christian virtue in the humblest cottager, after abating every thing on the score of human imperfection, is an exalted and noble state of attainment.

But let us come to the leader of modern infidelity, who, for more than sixty years, attracted and corrupted so large a body of followers. I acknowledge the extraordinary talents of Voltaire; the brilliancy of his parts, the fecundity of his imagination, the versatility which could apply itself to almost every subject; the beauty of a style which lost little of its charm at the close of a long life; the diligence, which was never wearied; the reputation and success in some branches of elegant literature, which gave him so wide a sway over public opinion. But I ask what was his MORAL AND RELIGIOUS character? I ask, how far it was probable that his objections against Christianity sprung from a sincere and steady pursuit of truth? Talents, if separated from morality, are of no value on such a question as religion. Let young people ever remember, that angelic powers, perverted by thorough hatred to goodness, are the very things which render the spiritual adversary of mankind so formidable and detestable.

I peruse, then; the full and authentic narratives of his life, published by his friends and disciples; I compare the most recent accounts; I consult, especially, the memoir lately published by one of the first of the French literati, and a person by no means unfriendly to the fame of his hero.⁵ I want to know what this sarcastic objector to Christianity was in his moral habits; what was his education; what his early life; what the course and bent of his pursuits. I want to see how far truth, religious and moral truth, was likely to visit his mind.

Impiety received him, says his biographer,⁶ as he left the cradle. He learned to read at the age of three years, by committing an irreligious book to me-

⁵ M. Auger, in the *Biographie Universelle*, tom. I.,—compared with his life by Condorcet, and the collections of the Abbé Barruël.

⁶ M. Auger.

mory. His uncle, to whose care he was intrusted, boasted that he had thus early initiated him into infidelity. When a boy at school, his daring blasphemies, connected with his natural talents, induced his tutor to predict, that he would raise the standard of deism in France. As his youth advanced, he was admitted into those horrible associations of debauchees and infidels, in the highest classes of society, who disgraced the close of the reign of Louis XIV. In mature life, he was remarkable for an unsettled, satirical, impetuous disposition; a temper wayward, even to malignity; outrageous violations of the decencies of the domestic circle; ridicule and hypocrisy at the deathbeds of his friends; duplicity, untruth, and even perjury, in his dealings; artifice, buffoonery, sarcasm, and the most unblushing calumnies, in his controversies; a treachery towards his friends, so deeply seated, that he loaded with flatteries and caresses, in his letters, the very persons whom he was at the same time covering with ridicule; and even calumniated, in clandestine writings, some of those individuals on whom he was pouring forth, in his ordinary correspondence, the warmest testimonies of friendship or consideration. As he approached old age, (he lived to be eighty-four,) his impiety became systematic, restless, aggressive, persevering, malignant, and almost furious. All seemed to him to be lawful in his contest against religion. His motives, in his attacks on Christianity, were not concealed. So far from pretending to have truth on his side, or to aim at truth, he was accustomed to say, "I am weary of hearing that twelve men established the gospel; I will see if one cannot overthrow it." His enmity and hypocrisy were carried so far, that he erected a Christian church, adjoining his château, at Ferney, and dedicated it to the Almighty, at the very moment that he was habitually applying to the divine Saviour of mankind a term too horrid to be cited. I say nothing of the impurity of

his conduct, the gross obscenity of his language and conversation, the notorious adultery in which he lived; because all this he avowed; it appears in all he said and did: it is thought, indeed, nothing of by the infidel party; it forms the conventional style of their books and correspondence, and constitutes one of the darkest features of their moral degradation.

To such a mind, truth must, of necessity, have been a stranger. Objections against Christianity from such a scoffer, are honourable and glorious attestations to the religion which they oppose.

Now, contrast with this character any of the eminent Christians that adorned their own country and Europe, about the same period. Take THE HONORABLE ROBERT BOYLE, of whom it is difficult to say, whether his piety as a Christian, or his fame as a philosopher, was most remarkable. Consider the compass of his mind, the solidity of his judgment, the fertility of his pen, the purity of his morals, the amiableness of his temper, his beneficence to the poor and distressed, his uniform friendships, his conscientious aim at truth in all his pursuits and determinations. At an early age, he examined the question of the Christian religion to the bottom, on occasion of some distracting doubts which assaulted his mind. Confirmed in the truth of Christianity, his whole life was a comment on his sincerity. He was admitted to certain secret meetings, before he had reached mature years—but they were grave and enlightened associations, for canvassing subjects of natural philosophy, at a time when the civil wars suspended all academical studies; and they led to the formation of one of the noblest establishments of his country.⁷ His disinterestedness and humility were such, that he refused the provostship of Eton, and the honours of a peerage, that he might devote his talents and time,

⁷ The Royal Society.

and noble fortune, to works of public utility and benevolence. His uniform regard to truth made him the example and admiration of his age. His tenderness of conscience led him to decline the most honourable office⁸ in the scientific world, because he doubted about the oaths prescribed; and his reverence for the glorious Creator induced him to pause whenever he pronounced his name. From such a student, we may expect truth. From such a philosopher, we receive, with unmixed pleasure, *A Treatise of THE HIGH VENERATION WHICH MAN'S INTELLECT OWES TO GOD*; ⁹ or the discourse *ON GREATNESS OF MIND PROMOTED BY CHRISTIANITY*. ¹⁰

But I dwell not on a single name. The whole body of real Christians is of the same stamp. Every where we see the good father and mother, the obedient child, the faithful domestic, the trustworthy officer, the conscientious magistrate, the honest statesman, the patriotic king. Begin with the first ages of Christianity, and contrast the respective discharge of moral and religious duties of those who rejected and those who embraced the Christian religion. Go down in each succeeding age. Look at the present. Take the body of infidels, and contrast them with the body of humble and pious Christians. You see in the one a frightful combination of all the intellectual and sensual vices, aggravated by hypocrisy, and darkened by malice, with no care of examining truth, and no wish to attain it; you see the domestic virtues contemned; the ties of brotherhood dissevered; you see such immoralities as go to dissolve civil society. Yes, infidelity carries with it the seeds of its own destruction; its enormities are too dissocial for the world long to endure them. It is Christianity which restrains their

⁸ President of the Royal Society.

⁹ Published in 1685.

¹⁰ Published in 1690, the year before his death.

excesses; and renders the society tolerable, which is harassed by their passions and their wickedness.

In the conduct of true Christians, you see all the bonds of peace, all that unites man with man, all that blesses the domestic circle, all that fulfils the various obligations under which God has placed us. Yes, Christianity has the impress of truth; its precepts are acted upon by its real disciples; the character of its divine Founder is copied out into the lives of his followers.

3. Let us pass to the especial point of **BENEVOLENCE AND GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN**—on which infidelity is apt to declaim; and which it becomes us therefore to examine.

Now, it is easy to affect a plausible benevolence, which is merely indifference to the inclinations, good or bad, of others; which rather deserves the name of connivance in iniquity, than real and enlightened goodwill. The question is, which class of persons is animated with the kindest feelings, is most free from the selfish passions, is most amiable and friendly in their deportment, most awake to the actual circumstances and dangers with which men are surrounded, and most ready to do and to suffer the necessary privations for delivering them from them.

No doubt, a man may affect great benevolence in throwing the reins on the neck of youthful profligacy. No doubt, a man may be loud in his claims of humanity, when he releases men from the obligations of religion and the bonds of conscience, and the restraints of virtue. No doubt, a plausible claim to universal benevolence may be set up by the infidel philosophy, which, neglecting all private and personal duties, launches forth into an expansive and sickly philanthropy, and affects to embrace mankind, whilst it overlooks its own immediate circle.

So the traveller who, assured that a precipice was near, should persuade his companion that no such

danger existed, and should tempt him to approach its brink, might be called benevolent. So the philosopher who should refuse to communicate some valuable discovery in science, and should spend his life in petty acts of indulgence to the passions of others, might be called benevolent. So the governor, who should conceal from a revolted province the anger of its sovereign, and the terms on which reconciliation might be effected, might be styled humane.

No! real goodwill to man is of a firmer texture and calls for other conduct. It searches for truth. It takes a wide and just view of men's circumstances. It proceeds on enlightened and adequate principles. It aims not merely at the immediate, but the ultimate good of man. It consults, not their passions, but their welfare—not their inclinations and prejudices, but their duties. It offends rather than deceives. It proposes displeasing truth, rather than flatter to destruction. It teaches and humbles, that it may save.

In this view, what is the benevolence of infidelity? Selfish in all its tendencies, it has nothing of the genuine sympathies which open the whole soul of man. No mark of the irreligious temper is more glaring, than its dark and almost furious hatred of those who oppose it? Who is the calumniator of the humble Christian, but the unbeliever? Who exposes meek piety to sarcasm and ridicule, but the unbeliever? Who resists the real influence of religion, and strives to wrest its consolations from miserable man, though he has nothing to substitute for it, but the unbeliever? Who refuses to communicate the healing remedy for human woe, which he cannot be sure is not of divine authority, but the unbeliever? Who denies the existence of that awful precipice which Christianity discovers and warns us against, but the unbeliever? Who conceals the revolt of man from his Maker, and hides from him the terms of reconciliation, but the unbeliever?

And as to domestic life and the flow of the benevolent affections, there are two things which are quite notorious. Infidelity is **TYRANNICAL IN ITS TEMPER**—capricious, harsh, malignant. All experience proves this. The infidel is unhappy in himself. He has forsaken the guide of life ; and is the sport of every paradox, every chimera, every wayward inclination ; the disorder of his passions is inconsistent with genuine benevolence. This is one point. Then infidelity is the **ENEMY TO FEMALE PURITY** ; there seems a peculiar madness in the contempt which it casts on all the branches of virtue, modesty, delicacy, and elevation in the female character. And what the torrents of misery are which overflow society from the one source of licentiousness, let daily experience in our great towns declare.

Now contrast with all this dark and gloomy picture the benevolence of Christianity. Its view of human depravity, is what the truth of the facts proclaims—the wrath of a holy God for sin is a discovery, not of Revelation only, but of that natural government of the Almighty which the unbeliever professes to admit, and which speaks in a voice of thunder the guilt of man and the Divine displeasure for it. But the benevolence of the sincere Christian appears exuberant in the tenderness with which he presses those discoveries upon the attention of men ; in the eagerness with which he presents the remedy for them ; in the kindness and affection with which he administers alleviations ; in the fellow-feeling which proposes truth with consideration and regard to circumstances and times. The benevolence of Christianity appears in the overflowing benignity with which all offices of mercy are discharged. It begins with the peaceful and mild affections, by subduing every angry and calming every turbulent passion ; it proceeds as a gentle stream, widening in its course. Or rather it resembles “ ma-

jestic rivers which are poured from an unfailing and abundant source. Silent and peaceful in their outset, they begin with dispensing beauty and comfort to every cottage by which they pass. In their further progress, they fertilize provinces and enrich kingdoms. At length, they pour themselves into the ocean, where, changing their name but not their nature, they visit distant nations and hemispheres, and spread throughout the world their expansive tide."¹¹

Christianity is, especially, a retired and private guest in the bosom and circles of individual households. Observe its benevolent working in those less communities which form public happiness and prosperity by their aggregation and effect. Mark how it reconciles man with himself and with his God; with his conscience and with his destiny: with his lofty breathings after happiness and immortality, and his present submission to pain and sorrow. From this inward peace, the springs of kindness and goodwill are opened. The Christian is kind to his wife and children, to his family and neighbours; he is kind and benignant to the vast mass of mankind, who have ever been neglected and despised by infidelity. What schemes for bettering the condition of the poor, what plans of philanthropy, what means of elevating, teaching, comforting, and blessing the bulk of the people, has Christianity induced, and practically brought to bear, in every day's common proceedings? Who visits the sick? Who attends the death-bed of the departing? Who plans and prosecutes benevolent missions into heathen countries? Who has the ardour of charity, arising from a perception of the importance of their own principles, and inextinguishable benevolence towards the whole human race?

Contrast, in point of mere benevolence, the lives and deportment of such an infidel as Rousseau, and such a Christian as Doddridge; the one all pride,

¹¹ Walpole.

selfishness, fury, caprice, rage, gross sensuality—casting about firebrands and death—professing no rule of morals but his feelings, abusing the finest powers to the dissemination, not merely of objections against Christianity, but of the most licentious and profligate principles; Doddridge, all purity, mildness, meekness and love, ardent in his goodwill to man, the friend and counsellor of the sorrowful; regular, calm, consistent; dispensing peace and truth by his labours and writings, living not for himself, but for the common good, to which he sacrifices his health and even life.

Or contrast such a man as Volney with Swartz. They both visit distant lands, they are active and indefatigable in their pursuits, they acquire celebrity; and communicate respectively a certain impulse to their widened circles. But the one, jaundiced by infidelity, the sport of passion and caprice, lost to all argument and right feeling, comes home to diffuse the poison of unbelief, to be a misery to himself, the plague and disturber of his country, the dark calumniator of the Christian faith. The other remains far from his native land to preach the peaceful doctrine of the gospel on the shores of India: he becomes the friend and brother of those whom he had never seen and only heard of as fellow-creatures; he diffuses blessings for half a century; he ensures the admiration of the heathen prince near whom he resides; he becomes the mediator between contending tribes and nations; he establishes a reputation for purity, integrity, disinterestedness, meekness, which compel all around to respect and love him; he forms churches, he instructs children, he disperses the seeds of charity and truth; he is the model of all the virtues he enjoins.¹² I do not stop to ask which is the benevolent

¹² See Reports of East India Mission, published by Society for promoting Christian Knowledge—and Memoirs of Swartz. —Lousseau's and Volney's lives are as notorious as their names.

individual. I do not stop to ask what is the result of this third step in our contrast. I see infidelity selfish, proud, resentful, the enemy of the domestic affections, the contemner of female innocence, without motives or effort for real, laborious, effective beneficence—I see Christianity overflowing with love, ready for every deed of mercy, with a heart full of benevolence, and a hand full of blessings. I see its eye beam with charity; and I read in its whole spirit, the distinctive impress of the religion which comes from heaven.

The argument advances. The futility of the speculative objections of infidelity, in themselves, is still more clearly demonstrated by contrasting the men who frame them, with sincere Christians, in the principles from which the respective opinions spring, the moral and religious conduct with which they are associated, and the measure of genuine benevolence which they produce.

But we pass to the contrast between the two classes,

II. AS TO THEIR MORE PUBLIC LABOURS AND THE WRITINGS THEY HAVE SUBMITTED TO THE EYE OF MANKIND.

For this is something more than the consideration of their conduct generally. Few points can better show whether men are likely to have truth on their side, as to such a subject as Christianity, than their more considerable undertakings, and especially their elaborate writings submitted to the public eye. Here you discover what they are deliberately aiming at.

Now, what characterises the chief labours of the infidel body? What is there of public spirit, love of their country, disinterested patriotism, generous self-devotion? Religion in connexion with Christianity, and all that bears upon it, they follow with deep-rooted contempt; but what do they undertake for promoting the more abstract and universal obligations

of religion, as distinguished from the express commands and the peculiar revelations of the gospel? Where are the proofs of labour and diligence to inculcate moral and religious principles as the foundation of personal and social happiness? Where are the efforts to emancipate men, by prudent and self-denying labours, from ignorance, injustice, oppression, slavery? Where are the patient endeavours, resting on the calm conviction of a righteous cause, and nourished by zeal in a good project, which bear them over obstacles, and carry them on to a distant but well-earned success?

There are schemes, indeed, formed by infidelity—but schemes for demoralizing their fellow-creatures; there are attempts—but attempts at revolution, anarchy, the subversion of all constituted authority; there are projects—but projects to sow the seeds of discontent, division, domestic and social misery; there are leaders—but leaders in immorality, stubbornness, vice, rebellion; there are examples—but examples of hypocrisy, flattery, chicane, the desertion of undertakings when they involve expense and trouble, a fawning on the great, views of private ambition and aggrandisement.

But as to virtuous effort for the good of mankind, there is a total blank, generally speaking. No doubt, many individuals may have promoted incidentally the welfare of mankind; but as to systematic, self-devoted labours, undertaken with firmness and pursued from principle, for the glory of God and the good of men, infidelity does not even pretend to them.

And then, as to their writings, we yield them all they demand on the score of wit, talent, diligence, elegance of style—but we ask, what are the moral characteristics of their works? What the object in view? What the probability that their objections to Christianity were the dictates of candid inquiry and honest search after truth? What the indications of

moral and religious feeling, knowledge of the subject of Christianity, freedom from disqualifying prejudice?

Take the infidel writings in our own country at the close of the seventeenth century, or those of the last age on the continent. Examine the works of Chubb or Tindal, of Hobbs or Woolston, of Bolingbroke or Collins. See what Voltaire, in his voluminous productions, was aiming at. Mark the bearings of the works of Diderôt, D'Alembert, Rousseau, and the other French infidels. Come down to present times—what are the writings of Hume, Gibbon, Byron, Shelley, Paine, and Carlile, in our own country?

EGOTISM is the first characteristic of their writings as a body. They have evidently the highest opinion of their own consequence—self stands forwards in the most disgusting prominence.

VANITY and the pursuit of personal fame and popularity next show themselves; principles which totally corrupt any search after truth, and destroy the just perception of any object which chances to be displeasing.

Then comes a MALIGNITY AGAINST Christianity, as we observed in our last Lecture as well as the present, entirely contrary to a calm conviction of mind and a legitimate attempt to overthrow and oppose error.

A disregard to TRUTH AND THE SANCTITY OF AN OATH must next be noticed. Voltaire practised the grossest and most daring falsehood and perjury, without scruple; disavowing his irreligious works with the solemnity of an oath; and arguing, from imperfect lines in his poetical productions, that he could not be their author.

A spirit of BLASPHEMY and contempt of God and his will, is also most apparent; not merely a neglect of Christianity, but a scorn of all religion, a dishonour studiously put on the majesty and dominion of the great God of heaven and earth.

A diligent aim at **CONFOUNDING VIRTUE AND VICE**, levelling the demarcations of morality, laughing at the usual reserves and decencies of life, is also most manifest. The more incongruous the union, in their feigned personages, of extraordinary tenderness of heart, of generosity and self-devotion to the good of others, with the basest vices and the most daring outrages upon decency and virtue, the better they are pleased.¹³

In writings composed of such materials, who would be surprised to see, what is the real fact, objections against Christianity, or rather a profligate persecution of every person and thing connected with it?

But there are three distinct charges which may be made out against the books of infidels, whether in our own country or on the continent. We charge them with **DISTORTING KNOWN FACTS**, and misquoting and altering the meaning of the authors whom they cite. Neither Hume, nor Gibbon, nor Voltaire, is trustworthy, on any matter touching upon Christianity. Habitually sceptical and hard of belief in the examination of things purely human, they cease to be so, the moment the Christian cause lies open to misrepresentation. The corruption of the texts of books, the mis-statement of matters of fact, the grossest unfairness in citations are accounted lawful by them in their contest with religion.

We charge them further with **INSIDIOUSLY CORRUPTING THE LITERATURE** of their day, and infusing

¹³ What is the aim of Lord Byron's poems—till we come to his flagitious and infidel effusions, just before his fearful end—but this! What are talents, wit, imagination, conversational powers, exertions to promote civil liberty, poetical fame—when all have been thus desecrated to the dishonour of God and of the Saviour of mankind; and ended in ruin to the possessor, and incalculable mischief to his fellow-creatures? What must be the effect of publishing his poisonous, blasphemous, and polluting correspondence?

into works of a scientific description, those doubts and objections which they had not the manliness to avow. We charge them with prosecuting a covert and dishonest warfare. We charge them with treachery to the best interests of truth and sincerity. We say that the artifices of Hume and Gibbon in this country, and of the Encyclopædists in an adjoining one, are disgraceful to men professing to be under the government of Almighty God, and amenable to him for their actions.

We charge them, lastly, with a measure of IMPURITY AND LICENTIOUSNESS which has no parallel, except in the grossest productions of heathen Greece and Rome. We charge them with pursuing this obscure and disgusting purpose with an art and a pertinacity, which indicates the total dissolution of moral principle and a heart entirely corrupted by vice and sensuality.

In short, we demand one thing. Where is the infidel publication which is calm, well-reasoned, placed on fair grounds of historical fact, proposed with the modesty and fear which the awful responsibility involved demands? Where is the manly, upright, serious treatise, bearing the marks of a sincere, a devout, and an unprejudiced inquirer? I know not one.

The only relief to the benevolent mind, amidst such a mass of moral evil, is to turn to the useful labours and meritorious and able writings of sincere Christians. What do they propose to themselves? What public undertakings do they engage in? What kind of efforts do they sustain for the mere good of others, and in obedience to their Saviour's commands? What probability is there, that they have truth on their side in what they do? These are the questions we propose.

I appeal to every one competent to form a judg-

ment. I say, every true, spiritual Christian is the cheerful servant of his fellow-creatures. I say, he not only sustains the principles of religion and morals ; that he not only performs the ordinary obligations resulting from them ; that he not only is animated with the purest spirit of benevolence ; but that his life is a life of labour for the good of others ; he has a principle of effort and active duty implanted in his breast, which shrinks from no difficulties, refuses no exertion, yields to no discouragements in a good cause. In what department of human life, is not the sincere Christian foremost, prompt, persevering in planning and executing schemes of beneficence and charity ?

Take the ministers of religion, those who are real Christians in heart, (for we own no others,) what, I ask, has been their course of effort in every age since the propagation of Christianity ? What their inextinguishable zeal for the present and future welfare of mankind ? What their laborious and ceaseless exertions ?

Consider the different classes of Christians. Take the missionary who, like Swartz, to whom we before referred, or Zeigenbald, or Brainerd, or Elliot, or Gerické, or Claudius Buchanan, or Martyn, have in silent and unobserved and distant labours, spent an useful and honourable life.

Observe the sincere Christians who are engaged in various professions, or occupied in commercial pursuits—what are the extensive schemes which they form to make their secular subserve their religious duties—to make their profession or their commerce a channel of communicating spiritual blessings ?

Scrutinize again the individual believer in the more retired orders of Christian society—the female sex, the various descriptions of domestic servants, in their private but assiduous diligence, beyond and beside their immediate duties, for promoting the glory of God and the happiness of mankind. The female cha-

racter, elevated and refined by Christianity, is not only preserved from debasement by the purity of the Christian precepts, but is animated to patient and humble, though retired, efforts to advance the highest interests of humanity.

Christianity is all effort and activity for the good of others. The believer loves his neighbour as himself.

And why should I contrast the WRITINGS of the true followers of Christianity, with the disgusting picture which truth has compelled me to draw of the infidel publications? Why should I oppose the HUMILITY of the Christian writer, with the egotism of the infidel? Why contrast his SELF-RENUNCIATION and conscious unworthiness and PURSUIT OF THE SOLE GLORY OF HIS GOD AND SAVIOUR, with the vanity and love of fame of the infidel? Why should I set off his BENIGNITY, AND KINDNESS, AND OPENNESS TO CONVICTION, AND FREEDOM FROM PERSONAL FEELINGS, with the malignity and rancour of the unbeliever? What avails my bringing into contrast the regard to truth, the plain research for matters of fact, the piety and awe at the name of God and reverence of his majesty, which pervade the Christian writings, with the false and impious and contemptuous spirit of infidels? Why should I fatigue you by detailing the strong moral distinctions between virtue and vice, in all their ramifications, which mark the Christian treatises, and the pernicious confusion of right and wrong which prevails in the infidel? No; I will not pursue the contrast, I will not darken the charges of dishonest quotation, insidious and cowardly methods of attack, and impurity of description and language, brought so justly against infidelity, by dwelling in this place on the historical testimonies and uncontroverted facts on which the Christian cause rests; on the open, manly, uncompromising fortitude which it displays; and the un-

sullied purity and delicacy of all its precepts and tendencies. All these things are too well known.

But I ask, how is it that Christian writers are so full, so manly, so laborious in the positive exhibition of the doctrines and precepts of their religion, when nothing of the sort can be shown in the writings of infidels as to the system of natural duty which they profess to defend? Where are the writings, on the unbeliever's part, which answer to our Christian fathers, to our commentators, to our ecclesiastical histories, to our moral essays, to our volumes of sermons, to our bodies of divinity? Where are any writers, on their professed scheme of religion, which answer to our Cyprian, our Chrysostom, our St. Austin, our Bernard? Where to our Hooker, our Jewel, our Luther, our Melancthon, our Pascal, our Sir Isaac Newton, our Bishop Pearson, our Baxter, our Archbishop Leighton, our Bishop Hall, our Doddridge? A death-like silence prevails. I can find no one Christian book that does not partake of the essential moral elements of truth, purity, and sincerity; and no one infidel writing that does. No. It is unnecessary for me to sum up this second head. I content myself with appealing to every conscience, whether our argument does not strengthen as we proceed—whether, in point of public labour and writings, Christianity does not bear as prominently the seal of truth and God and heaven upon it, as infidelity does that of falsehood and of the rebellious spirits of darkness? I ask, whether, after having shown the futility of the objections of infidelity in themselves, we do not seem to have completed the overthrow, by exhibiting the deliberate aim of those who framed them? I ask, whether objections are worth considering which must be culled out from the dishonesty, egotism, malignity, and moral pollution, of the works in which they are buried?

But an additional fact will raise this whole branch

of proof to a yet higher point. In numerous cases, all these excellencies of the Christian character have been the result of a **DECIDED CONVERSION FROM THE VERY INFIDELITY** which lies on the other side of our contrast. Multitudes of these Christians, whose principles, moral conduct, benevolence, and useful writings, we have been considering, were once enemies of Christianity, vain, perverse, arrogant, debased, profligate; but they were brought to consideration—they were led to examine, (as I have mentioned in the case of Mr. Boyle,) the question of Christianity with calmness. The result was an entire change from the degradation and vices of infidelity, to the elevation and purity of the Christian faith. They proclaim the alteration. They confess with grief the motives which dictated their former rebellion; they distinctly avow the source of their errors and guilt; they open to us the real cause of the objections of infidelity. Thus the camp of the enemy betrays itself. The Christian advocate, like Augustine in the fourth century, is brought out from the midst of its foes; and we have the singular advantage of knowing the ground on which infidels, continuing such, stand, by the ground on which the Christian convert confesses he once stood himself.

Infidelity has nothing to show of a kind similar to this. Where are her converts from among devout and serious Christians? Where are those who confess the guilt of believing the revelation of the Bible? Where are the regrets and penitence for having obeyed the gospel? All is a blank. Infidelity and her objections, are **DISOBEDIENCE**; faith, with her solid fruits, is **OBEDIENCE** to the great God and Father of all.

But I hasten to the last division of our contrast.

III. THEIR DEATHS AND PREPARATION FOR AN ETERNAL STATE OF BEING.

And here the interval widens: the gloom deepens

even to darkness on the one side, whilst the light breaks forth into splendour on the other. Whatever contrast there may be between the two classes, as to their principles, their general conduct, their benevolence, their public labours and writings, this contrast is immeasurably more awful as we view them as to their approach toward death, and their preparation for eternity.

What, then, is the death-bed of the unbeliever? What is he engaged in at this solemn season? How does his conscience respond to the inquiry, "Have I been seeking truth?" Alas! the thick obscurity of the scene too surely portends what is beyond! For of whatever particular description be his death, it gives a loud and clear testimony against the objections he has been relying on—they condemn, they desert, they betray him at last.

Whether we look to the confessions and regret of some infidels in the article of death—the obduracy and insensibility of others—the pride and presumption of a third class—the carelessness and levity which mark a fourth—the rage and despair by which others are rendered awfully conspicuous; or the self-destruction by which so great a number fall; whatever cases we select and contrast with the circumstances of the dying Christian—all, all proclaim that infidelity is rebellion against the God of heaven, and that her objections are the mere foaming and boiling over of man's inbred corruptions; whilst truth and holiness and the attestations of God, in his moral government, are on the side of Christianity.

1. Notice the REGRET AND CONFESSIONS of the awakened infidel on his death-bed. I hear Burnet's convert¹¹ acknowledge that the real source and spring of his unbelief, was a space of five years spent in profligacy—that his vices had led him to seek a miserable

¹¹ Lord Rochester.

refuge in infidelity and presumption. I hear many of the culprits, who have been doomed to expiate their crimes against society by an ignominious death, own and lament their infidel principles, as the first cause of the deeds for which they suffered.¹⁵ What do these confessions teach me? Where is the Christian that ever lamented on a dying bed his belief in the revelation of the gospel? I ask for a single example of any sincere believer in Revelation, being confused and ashamed at last for his faith. Where is the instance? I demand only one, if it exists, that at the least I may weigh the fact against the numerous—the innumerable instances I was going to say—of confession, and shame, and sorrow, which the victims of infidelity furnish. Multitudes of Christians have regretted that they had not more fully obeyed their religion, but not one that he had reposed his trust in it.

2. But take the **OBDUKATE AND INSENSIBLE** class of death-bed scenes. I approach the dying infidel, occupied to the last instant with secular concerns, calculating on the time which remains for him, without a thought or reference to eternity; without a reflection on the past, or a prayer for the future; utterly callous to every thing that regards him as an immortal and accountable creature; repelling the voice and invitations of the minister of religion. What does all this proclaim? What is there here of a right state of heart? Is insensibility to the greatest of all concerns reasonable or becoming in man?

Contrast with this insensibility the dying couch of the Christian. He perceives death to approach; he prepares for the event; he examines his heart and life; he calls in the minister of grace; he confesses

¹⁵ I have in my possession a letter from the chaplain, who attended the conspirators against the lives of his Majesty's ministers, in 1809, known by the name of the Cato-street conspirators, which informed me that all the leading criminals were avowed infidels.

every past sin ; he forgives every injury ; he composes himself to the nearer struggle with the great foe ; he trusts to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ ; he commends his children, his servants, to the care of a kind and powerful heavenly Father ; he dies in peace. Nature, conscience, the slightest moral feeling, compel one to declare that this man is right—and the other deceived and ruined. It is impossible to look on the one without horror, or on the other without assurance of his future happiness and joy.

3. But contrast the PRIDE AND PRESUMPTION of other infidels at the approach of death, with the humility and prostration of heart which meekly adorn the departing Christian. I see Gibbon, full of vanity to the last dregs of life, calculating, only twenty hours before its close, on the probability of a continued existence for fifteen years ; confessing, that as life wore away, the failure of hope gave “ a browner tint to the prospects of man ;” and meeting the Almighty, whom he had been by his laborious and artful infidelity and licentiousness, daring to his face, with a treacherous confidence. What, what does such a scene teach one ? Or, again, when I hear the last presumptuous accents of Rousseau, claiming the favour of his Creator, and declaring that he returned him his soul pure and immaculate as he had received it, what does it impress upon the attentive mind ?

Let the humility of the Christian's death-bed give the proper reply. I see the almost unequalled Pascal, after a life of eminent sanctity, and the composition of works which have long been the admiration of Christendom, approaching his end. During his malady, charity and patience were the conspicuous features of his mind. His humility was such, that he desired to have a poor sick person brought into his chamber, and receive the same attentions with himself. Being interrogated by the minister of religion, as to his faith, before he received the sacrament, he

said, "Yes, sir; I believe all that with all my heart." He then said, "May God never leave me;" which were his last words, except short thanksgivings, before he fell gently asleep, as it were, in his Saviour's arms.

4. Come with me to another scene. Let me show you the TRIFLING AND CARELESS infidel, in contrast with the serious and solemn Christian in their last hours; and let conscience say, which has followed truth. Hume is near his end. Levity and satire occupy his discourse. He jokes about Lucian, and Charon, and the crazy boat, and the fabled Styx; he frames various reasons, which he might assign for delaying his transmission. Trifling dissipation, even games at whist, fill the intervals. The retouching of his infidel writings is his employment. He finishes on his death-bed,—I relate it with horror,—his Essay on Suicide, in which he encourages a profane and irreligious age to this last miserable act of presumption and despair. In this frame he dies. What an over-acted part! What a frightful unconcern! What an unnatural contempt of that dissolution of the mortal frame, which sin has induced, and which carries man before the tribunal of God! Is this the hero of your natural religion? Is this the man, whose cold-blooded scepticism was only equalled by the disgusting licentiousness of his moral code; who overturns all testimony with one hand, and all virtue with the other? Yes, the brand of the Almighty did not appear more visible in the judicial obduracy of Pharaoh, than in the infidel being given up to the levity of such a death-bed.

How opposite to this the seriousness of the judicious Hooker; a man superior to Hume in all the powers of the mind, as well as in all the moral and religious endowments of the heart. His last words were, "I have lived to see this world is made up of perturbation, and I have been long preparing to leave it, and

have been gathering comfort for the dreadful hour of making up my account with God, which I now apprehend to be near: and though I have, by his grace; loved him in my youth, and feared him in mine age, and laboured to have a conscience void of offence to him, and to all men; yet, if thou, Lord, be extreme to mark what I have done amiss, who can abide it? And therefore, where I have failed, Lord, show mercy to me; for I plead not my righteousness, but the forgiveness of my unrighteousness, for his merit, who died to purchase a pardon for penitent sinners."¹⁶

5. But I must go on to present to you, painful as is the task, the RAGE AND DESPAIR with which some infidels are visited in their death; and contrast it with the joy and triumph which frequently mark that of the faithful Christian.

In his second part of the "Age of Reason," Paine had boasted that a fever which he and those about him expected to prove mortal, made him remember, with renewed satisfaction, that he had written the former part of that work, and he "knew therefore," he said, "by experience, the conscientious trial of his own principles." But when he actually approached the grave, he began to betray those terrors which before he had laughed at. Often, for a long time together, he exclaimed, "O Lord, help me! O Christ, help me!" As his illness increased, he would not be left alone, night nor day; nor would he suffer his attendant out of his sight. His physician pressed him to confess his guilt and errors, but he sullenly refused, in a way which convinced Dr. Manly, that if he had not been an infidel 'so completely pledged to the world, he would publicly have revoked and renounced his infidelity. He declared on one occasion, "that if ever the devil had had an agent upon earth, he had been one." When his infidel com-

¹⁶ Walton.

panions said, You have lived like a man—we hope you will die like one, he observed to one near him, “You see, sir, what miserable comforters I have.” The woman whom he had seduced from her husband, lamented to her neighbours, “For this man I have given up my family and my friends, my property and my religion. Judge, then, of my distress, when he tells me, that the principles he has taught me, will not bear me out.”

And what were the last days of Voltaire? Hypocrisy the most debasing, and terrors the most frightful, united to render them a fearful lesson of what infidelity may bring a man to at last. When he thought himself in danger of death, he sent for the Abbé Gauthier, crying out, “I do not wish to have my body cast into the common sewer.” He then scrupled not to declare, that “he wished to die in the Catholic religion, in which he was born, and that he asked pardon of God and the church for the offences that he might have committed against them.” As death approached, his terrors overcame him. His friends never came near him, but to witness their own shame. He said to them, “Sirs, it is you who have brought me to my present state; begone—I could have done without you all.” He was alternately supplicating and blaspheming God, and crying out, “O Christ! O Jesus Christ!”¹⁷ M. Tronchin, struck with horror, retired, confessing, the death-bed of the impious man was awful indeed. The Marshal Richlieu flew from the bed-side, declaring the sight too terrible to be sustained. And the nurse who attended him, being many years afterwards requested to wait on a sick Protestant gentleman, refused, till she was assured he was not a philosopher; declaring, if he were, she would on no account incur the danger of witnessing such a

¹⁷ M. Auger passes over his death-bed scene, by confessing generally, that much obscurity rests upon it—a pretty clear intimation of what he suspected to be the real truth.

scene as she had been compelled to do at the death of M. Voltaire.¹⁸

And now turn your eye to yonder crowd ; it surrounds the Christian martyr ; approach—hear the dying Ignatius rejoicing in his Saviour, when cast to the lions. Or see the female martyr Blandina, in the next age, triumphing by faith, even under the most brutal persecution. Or view the noble leaders of the English Reformation, Ridley and Latimer. They meet at the stake—they encourage each other to suffer with pleasure. “Be of good heart, Brother,” says Ridley to his companion, “for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it.” He then calmly addresses his prayers to the Almighty, “O heavenly Father, I give unto Thee most hearty thanks, for that thou hast called me to be

¹⁸ This simple incident is most touching and important.—It is nature itself.—I received the account from the son of the gentleman to whose dying bed the woman was invited.

Of the posthumous mischief effected by Voltaire, the following calculation may give some idea. His death took place in 1778. Between the years 1817 and 1824, the Paris editions of his works amounted to 1,417,000 volumes. Supposing the same number to have been circulated in the six years that have passed since 1824 ; and twice the number in the forty preceding, we have a total of nearly six millions of volumes issued from the Paris press only ; and every volume teeming with errors, misrepresentations, objections against Christianity, and the grossest impurities. What must be the state of society on the Continent, to receive such a mass of evil—and what the account to be rendered at the bar of God by the author of it all !

The Lectures of Mr. Boyle, which have furnished, during more than a century, the ablest defences of Christianity—the works of Luther—the thoughts of Pascal—the writings of Hooker—the innumerable Christian books silently diffused during ages, and scattering knowledge and piety in the widest manner, outweigh, no doubt, the mischiefs of these infidel works ; without lessening our regret or detestation at their unparalleled wickedness.

a professor of Thee, even unto death. I beseech Thee, O Lord God, take mercy on this realm of England, and deliver the same from all her enemies." The fire being kindled, he cried out, "Into thy hand, O Lord, I commend my spirit; Lord, receive my spirit!"—and Latimer, in similar words, "O Father of heaven, receive my soul."

Such is Christianity in martyrdom. But take a different scene. Enter the silent chamber of sickness, and hear the accents of triumph and joy fall from the Christian's lips. Oberlin, the devout and benevolent pastor of the Ban de la Roche, sinks imperceptibly into the arms of death. For nearly sixty years, he had been the friend of all his parishioners, the helper of the poor, the minister of improvements, the founder of public edifices, the author of a more cultivated language, the discoverer of infant schools, the noble and disinterested servant of God his Saviour.¹⁹ He had been, not only the minister and evangelist, but the schoolmaster, farmer, mechanic, and physician of his people. As death approached, he gave himself to prayer for himself and his parishioners, specifying the particular names of each. He longed for the joyful period when, released from his narrow prison-house of clay, he might enter upon that happiness, which he humbly expected through the merits of the Son of God. His last hours come on. He exclaims, as his strength permits, "Lord Jesus, take me speedily! Nevertheless, thy will be done!" Tenderly embracing a young Christian minister, he said, "The Lord bless you, and all who are dear to you! may he be with you day and night!" As his spirit was departing, he

¹⁹ In 1818, a gold medal was presented to him by the Royal and Central Agricultural Society of Paris, for his improvements in agriculture, and his advancement of the interests of humanity.

joined his hands, raised his eyes towards heaven, his countenance beaming with faith, joy, and love."²⁰

6. And how can I proceed to set before you, as I must, THE SUICIDAL HORRORS which too often spring from infidelity; in contrast with the meek patience under suffering, of the humble Christian? Yes, the pride and vain objections of unbelievers give way under them. Abandoned of the Spirit of grace, they may believe their own lie; but they have no hold really of that natural religion which, for the purposes of argument, they will defend. All their pursuits, and habits, and principles, have been cherishing selfish passions, a sense of personal importance, discontent and misanthropy, licentious indulgences pushed to satiety, and issuing in a total dissolution of the moral principle. The object of pity and contempt to mankind, they have no refuge in the time of calamity, which they often create by their crimes; and then, hurried forward by Satan, the great murderer, they hesitate not, oftentimes, to lay violent hands on themselves.²¹ Thus fearfully do too many of them close the career of vanity, presumption, and defiance of the Almighty. Thus does the last and most daring of all provocations, a crime which heathen moralists condemned, and which outrages that first powerful principle of self-preservation implanted in all animated beings by the Creator, close the moral proof against the infidel, and serve to seal, with the indignation of the great Governor of the universe, a cause which peculiarly provokes his divine majesty.

Contrast with this the meek patience of the suffering Christian, when nature, oppressed with disease, and racked with pain, reposes yet on the bosom of Omnipotence, and flies for succour to the arms of a

²⁰ *Memoirs of Oberlin.*

²¹ The number of suicides in France during the reign of infidelity and atheism, was frightful.

merciful and all-wise God. Yes, instead of thinking of the desperate resource of self-destruction, he finds relief in faith and resignation ; he is sustained by the gracious Spirit ; he submits humbly to the divine appointments ; he says, " Not my will, but thine be done."

But I need not confine myself, as I have done, to an appeal to public authorities, and the lives of saints, recorded in writings accessible to all. I might appeal to the observation of actual matters of fact, occurring under the eye of the minister of religion ; and, indeed, of every Christian at all advanced in the journey of life, and furnished with occasions of making the remark.

You have seen the venerable father of a family, after a long life of useful diligence, meeting the last agonies of sickness, and the extreme struggle of nature, with unyielding patience ; a mind reposing on God ; a steady, humble, firm acquiescence in the divine will ; a freedom from discontent and repining ; a full persuasion that a heavenly rest awaits him—in this way he departs, and leaves the fragrance of his example to his children.

You have seen the aged and beloved mother, in extreme weakness, waiting year after year for the coming of her Lord. Languishing disease visits her frame ; nature feels and shrinks from suffering, but religion steps in ; the principles acted upon through life sustain her in meek submission to the holy will of her heavenly Father ; the struggle is over, and she is made, " more than a conqueror through him that hath loved her."

You have followed through years of intense pain and suffering, an affectionate wife, the mother of your children, the companion of your sorrows. Christianity has never failed her. Patience has had her perfect work. A prospect of heaven has gilded the margin of the tomb. Anguish and grief have been felt, but

have been sustained by the inward supplies of grace and consolation. Prayer, exhortations to her children, praises to her Redeemer, meditations on the glories of heaven, have beguiled the hours of suffering, and have carried nature above itself.

You have seen the beloved child, in the first bloom of youth, snatched by a stroke of calamity or disease from your anxious and flattering hopes ; but you have seen the Christian faith, as the anchor of the soul, support the sufferer, pour in a flood of light and peace into the dark, dark chamber, and begin, even upon earth, the joy and the songs of the redeemed in heaven.

These scenes are occurring daily. The records of every family where real Christianity is known, contain such histories. And, in truth, all the preceding points of the contrast are equally verified in the private annals of Christian affection ; just as the same private recollections furnish unnumbered confirmations of what we have asserted, from public documents, as to the deaths of unbelievers.

And how can I bring myself to say any thing, after this contrast, on the respective PREPARATION FOR AN ETERNAL STATE OF BEING, as made by the two classes before us ? How can I pause to ask you which prepares most rationally and efficiently for that future world which they profess, in common, to be the great object of life ? Place the two bodies in contrast, in this respect. View them with all the impartiality which can be brought to bear on the subject, and tell me which fulfils best the ends of their being, as immortal, accountable creatures, placed in a state of probation, and preparing themselves, by the habits which they now acquire, for a correspondent state of existence through eternity.

The very question answers itself ; so completely are the professed principles of the infidel belied in practice. He has, in truth, no principles ; he acts as if

he had no soul ; he sinks man into the brute ; he obliterate's the distinction of reason and moral government ; he plays the desperate game of daring the almighty Judge of the world. The end of man's being is lost, so far as the unbeliever is concerned, if that end be to honour God, his Creator ; to love and serve him, to please and worship, to regard and reverence his name. The end of man's being is lost, if it be to rise from the lower appetites and the dominion of sensuality, to spiritual enjoyments, the contemplation of heaven, the exercises of holy affections. The end of man's being is lost, if it be to disseminate the largest measure of happiness, to exercise kindness and benignity to his fellow-creatures, to purify and enlarge his moral faculties, and to attain the highest measure of the love of God and man. The end of man's being is lost, if it be to have an eye on his eternal destinies, and consider himself a stranger here on earth, whose home, whose happiness, whose repose is heaven. Infidelity is the wretched device to indulge the worst propensities of a fallen understanding and a fallen heart ; it virtually excludes God and religion from the regard of man ; it chains him down to earth, and shuts out from his view all that would disencumber, elevate, and bless him. There lies the low, grovelling, enslaved creature ; all his nobler powers depressed ; his connexion with God and eternity forgotten ; the sport of objection and prejudice and lust and malignant passions ; with no religion to counsel him here, no futurity to reward him hereafter—But it cannot be. Man cannot altogether obliterate his moral nature. Conscience refuses the compact. The aspirations and breathings of man after immortality cannot be altogether suppressed. The infidel is wretched, dissatisfied, foreboding—though an atheist in principle, if not in words, he is compelled to feel, even here, the retributive justice which the Almighty does not fail to exercise.

And now, turn to the real Christian. After making every deduction for his imperfections, and the consequences of temptation; yet, what is the main bent of his character? All bears on the end of man; all tends to elevate, to purify, to bless him. The immortality and immateriality of the soul, a future judgment, the state of probation in which he now is; a preparation, by habits acquired here, for the enjoyment of eternity; a regard to God, the supreme Arbiter—these principles enter into all his conduct, and regulate the business of every day. To subdue his fallen propensities—to press down the cravings of appetite—to extirpate the seeds of the malignant passions, is his main design. His pursuits, his religious duties, his conversation, his reading, all tend to these objects. He labours to give the soul the advantage over the body; to give the future the advantage over the present; to give eternity the advantage over time; to give to God and duty the advantage over Satan and sin. And the peculiar discoveries of the Christianity which he believes, the grace and revelation of Christ, and the influences of the Spirit, carry him on toward his end—prepare him for eternity. The love of God and his Saviour fills his heart, and expands and strengthens his capacities for spiritual enjoyments.

And there is this remarkable in the contrast of the two classes, that each becomes more distinctly under the influence, good and bad, of his principles, as time flows on and death approaches. The infidel is worse the longer he lives; the Christian better. The infidel sinks lower; the Christian rises higher. The infidel is more gloomy; the Christian more cheerful. The infidel clings more tenaciously to the world, which he is quitting; the Christian is attracted more powerfully towards the heavenly state, to which he is going.

And what can speak more loudly, as to which of the classes has truth with it, than the contrast, so dark on the one side, so bright on the other! And there is less

of doubt in the accuracy of these statements, because, whatever else the infidel may pretend to during life, he never claims much familiarity with a future world: he boasts and glories in his earthly prospects; he openly discards any pleasurable and voluntary contemplation of a heavenly state. Selfish and sensual gratifications, schemes of worldly ambition, the pursuit of wealth, or literature, or lucre, are avowedly his objects. The Christian, on the other hand, has his delight in the contemplation of eternity; he converses willingly on a future world; he professes continually to delight in higher and nobler and purer objects than any earthly possessions or acquirements. He has the stamp and seal of God and heaven upon him, as he approaches the close of his mortal career.

The case speaks loudly, and appeals to every conscience. Consider only the two classes of men on the largest scale. Leave out all doubtful individuals. Take the thorough and complete unbeliever and the thorough and complete Christian; and the more you examine the two characters in their principles, their practice, their claims to benevolence, their public labours and writings, their deaths, their fulfilment of the ends of their being, the deeper will be your conviction of the truth of the Christian religion, and the utter folly and impiety of infidelity.

I dare not pursue the subject further. I shrink from the contemplation of the eternal condition of the two bodies of men. I could dwell, indeed, on the ineffable joys of the humble Christian, his immediate access to his Maker and Redeemer, his freedom from all pain, all imperfection, all change; his fruition of all the bliss of which his body and his soul are capable: but the other side of the contrast would be too fearful. I draw a veil over the scene—I have said enough.

I would fain persuade myself that there is not a

young person before me, who does not feel convinced that the objections of infidelity turn out, as we predicted, to be a confirmation of the cause they were adduced to oppose; that they not only lose their force, but become one of the most fruitful sources of subsidiary proof to the divine origin of the Bible.

Yes; the whole question about Christianity, and its importance and truth, may be settled by the subject before us.

Conceive all the wise and good men through every generation, and in the most distant countries, who have agreed in receiving the Bible as a divine Revelation, to be assembled together. Weigh their pretensions to your confidence. Many of them have been noted for seriousness, erudition, extent of talent, penetration, and impartiality in judging of men and things. They have taken the utmost pains to satisfy themselves upon the question of the truth of Christianity. Their holy lives, and patient sufferings, and happy deaths, (many of them by martyrdom,) command the respect of all who know them, and are proper grounds of confidence, in their deliberate judgment, as to a question of religion.

Then assemble in another body, the leading infidels and unbelievers, who have lived in many generations, and in distant countries, and who have agreed in rejecting, on the ground of speculative, and inconsistent, and oft-refuted objections, the truth of Christianity. Weigh the natural grounds of distrust on a religious question, which their habits, their tempers, their pursuits, their vicious lives, their fearful deaths, present. Consider the atheism into which they have too often fallen. Consider the utter destitution of any thing in the place of Christianity, which they are compelled to confess. Observe the levity, ridicule, scorn, apparent in their spirit and conduct. Mark the impurity and sensuality, the pride and presumption, which prevail in their writings.

Observe their awful deaths. Weigh the manner in which they respectively prepare for an eternal world.

TELL ME, THEN, WHICH COMPANY HAS TRUTH ON ITS SIDE? TELL ME WHICH COMPANY YOU WOULD WISH TO BE FOUND IN AT THE BAR OF GOD?

I cannot but suppose that if an individual of any class of beings, of entire impartiality, of a sound mind, and of a holy disposition, should be shown the two companies of those who have received and those who have rejected the Scriptures; and should compare the seriousness, learning, patient investigation of truth, solid judgment, holy, useful lives, manly and becoming composure in a dying hour, of the one company, with the character and conduct of the other, he would be induced, though he knew nothing of the direct arguments for the Christian Revelation, to take up the Bible with profound veneration, and the strongest prepossession in its favour.²²

But, strong as this ground in favour of Christianity is, you do not merely stand here. You place your feet, my young friends, upon the mass of external and internal evidences, on which its divine authority rests. You plant yourselves upon the testimonies by which it is maintained. You fix your standing, in the midst of a confused and dark world, upon an immoveable rock.

It is only as a subsidiary argument that I have been considering the vanity of the objections against Christianity in themselves and in the persons who advance them.

Choose, then, your part more decidedly and boldly. If you have been at all entangled by the artful sophisms of scepticism, (and nothing is more easy to the corrupt heart of man,) break through the fatal delusion. Awake to the true state of things. If you

²² Scott.

cannot answer those objections specifically, outweigh them by the positive facts of Christianity; outweigh them by considering the impertinence of speculative reasonings, against the historical and uncontroverted evidences of Revelation; outweigh them by remembering that they apply as much to Deism as they do to Christianity; outweigh them by recollecting that they are only trials of your sincerity and submission of heart to God. But, beside this, especially outweigh them by looking at the lives and deaths of those who make objections to Christianity, and of those who obey Revelation. Death is near. The solemnities of that hour, no trifling, no obduracy can lessen. The awful consequences of that hour no tongue can describe. Reject, then, all the overtures of unbelief, which has no blessing of God in life nor in death. Fly from the society of those persons with whom you would not wish to be associated in eternity.

Remember, if you would be joined with the righteous in their death, you must follow their example in life. I know that you would prefer to enter another world with the wise and good. But the question of most practical importance is, WHICH COMPANY DO YOU WALK WITH IN THE JOURNEY OF LIFE? Choose now, while time is granted you, the right path. Take, with wisdom and manliness, the side of truth. All infidelity is essentially ungodliness; it springs from that temper—it leads to it. Christianity is essentially godliness and holiness. Obedience and disobedience to Almighty God form the substance of the two classes.

All we have been stating in this Lecture, and, indeed, in all those on the internal evidences, are the declarations of the moral Governor of the world against infidelity, and in favour of Christianity: they are so many stamps and brands of the divine displeasure upon the whole system of unbelief; and of divine approbation upon the whole system of the Christian

evidences. Just as the course of events in the natural world has the impress of God's approbation of prudence and forethought, and his disapprobation of carelessness and improvidence; and as his government of the moral world is filled with indications of his favour towards virtue, and his indignation against vice;²³ so are the lives and deaths of infidels, compared with those of sincere Christians, demonstrations in favour of Christianity, and against unbelief; demonstrations which no arts can evade, no sophisms misinterpret; demonstrations which multiply upon our view the more we pursue the subject and which the inmost soul of man cannot but feel and acknowledge; demonstrations which augment in intenseness in each case, as the respective principles are more fully acted upon, and the termination of life draws nigh; demonstrations which render speculative objections matters of direct criminality and positive perverseness and rebellion of heart in those who adhere to them; and which carry the direct evidences of Revelation to their utmost height of satisfaction to every considerate mind; demonstrations, in a word, which turn the weapons of infidelity, as we predicted would be the case, against itself, and render them the instruments of its overthrow; so that, instead of proving any thing against Christianity, they demonstrate that a religion, attested by such solid evidences on the one hand, and opposed by the weak and unfounded cavils of such unprincipled and unhappy men on the other, cannot but be divine.

²³ Butler.

LECTURE XXIII.

THE FAITH WITH WHICH THE CHRISTIAN RE-
VELATION IS TO BE RECEIVED.

1 JOHN v. 9.

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God
is greater.*

HAVING concluded the arguments by which the truth of Christianity is established, it might be thought that nothing further need be observed; but that the whole subject should now be left to the reflections of the humble enquirer. And thus it must be left—but not before we have described the FAITH with which the Revelation should be received, the INTERPRETATION which that faith implies, and the OBLIGATION under which every one is placed to receive and obey the religion.

For such is the corruption of man, that nothing must be taken for granted. Certainly he ought most thankfully to embrace the Christian doctrine. Certainly nothing is so reasonable and so directly calculated to promote his present and future happiness, as to welcome with joy the tidings of salvation. Yet he is far from doing this as he should. After all the arguments in the world, his perverse heart may, and often does, refuse to act upon the conclusions to which

they lead ; it too often yields only a tame assent to the Revelation ; it explains away the meaning of all the main truths of Scripture ; it weakness or denies the practical obligations which the whole subject imposes. Thus, the great design of the Christian religion is defeated. We must explain, therefore, what is meant by faith, what is meant by a sound interpretation of the records which it receives, and the practical obligations resulting from both.

These topics will occupy the three following Lectures, and leave us at liberty to sum up the entire course in a concluding one.

On the present occasion, we shall endeavour to show the NATURE of the faith with which we should receive the Christian Revelation ; the REASONABLENESS of our being called on for such a faith, after having admitted the divine authority of Christianity ; and the EXTENT to which, from the nature of the case, this faith should be carried.

I. We consider THE NATURE OF FAITH IN DIVINE REVELATION.

Something has been incidentally said on this subject in several of our preceding Lectures,¹ and the way prepared for the specific consideration which belongs to this place.

Faith, in its general import, is credit given to testimony ; it is the reliance of the mind on the report or statement made by another. It is that peculiar act of the understanding by which we avail ourselves of

¹ At every step in the External argument, we pointed out the degree of faith which should follow it, especially in Lectures VI. and VII. on the Credibility and Miracles. When we reviewed the Internal arguments, we showed that they sprang from a just reliance on the truth of the Revelation as established by the preceding string of proofs. In the Lectures (XIX. and XX.) on the test, faith was of necessity again touched upon. Our last two Lectures on the Objections yet more directly prepared the way for considering it.

information in those things which do not fall under our own observation, and do not admit of proof in the way of reasoning.

The complicated machine of human society is moved almost exclusively by this very principle which men so frequently object to, as it respects Christianity.

Testimony received and relied on, directs the determination of princes and councils, of senates and military commanders, of judges and magistrates, of merchants and scholars ; in short, of all the various classes of persons, in all the various ramifications of their dealings with each other. Human testimony, in matters which fall within its province, is as sure a rule of truth, as the senses and reasoning are, in the things to which they are respectively applicable. A reliance on testimony is as much a law of our nature as is consciousness or moral responsibility. Human life is governed by it. Every man has this faculty or capacity of believing ; and every man exerts it according to his habitual associations of thought and feelings.

When we speak, then, of faith in a divine Revelation, we speak of a thing perfectly well known in itself, though, from the depravity of our nature, difficulties attend it when applied to this particular subject. But

itself what is faith in Christianity ? It is credit given to a divine testimony—a reliance of mind on the record or statement made by Almighty God in the book which we admit to be inspired and dictated by Him.

The apostles, at the promulgation of the gospel, bear witness to the resurrection of Christ. The Jews and Heathen hear their testimony, and see the miraculous works which sustain it. They act upon the infinitely important matters thus brought to their knowledge ; they credit the report ; they believe the gospel. This is the turning point in their conversion. The gospel and epistles are written by the same inspired men, and are sent to the different Pagan peo-

ple ; the evidences of the books are stated ; the people receive them as divine, believe in them, rely on them —this is faith, that is, the link between the testimony of God contained in the Revelation, and their minds. Eighteen centuries pass ; the sacred books are handed down to us ; they are proved to be authentic, credible, of divine authority, inspired ; they are found to contain much that is obviously most worthy of God, and most suitable to man ; they offer themselves to us, in some part of their contents, as the subject of actual experiment ; the speculative objections raised against them are frivolous and contradictory. What next ? If I act as becomes an accountable being, I repose with my whole mind on the sure testimony of God ; I exercise the same faculty of believing, by which I continually guide myself in all my most weighty and momentous temporal affairs, on this new and divine testimony which is laid before me by the infinitely wise, infinitely true, and infinitely holy Creator and Judge of the world.

And if a child relies on the witness of an earthly father ; if it knows and feels something of its own weakness, ignorance, and liableness to err ; and not only credits in a slight and general manner what its parent says, but has confidence in him, relies with implicit trust and repose of mind, and receives with affectionate gratitude all his communications ; much more shall man, the weak, ignorant, fallen child of his heavenly parent, receive that heavenly parent's testimony, and confide in it with repose and satisfaction of mind, with gratitude and joy.

The Scripture contains a message of infinite importance from the eternal God to his rebellious creatures. The messenger arrives. His credentials are exhibited. The external evidences are admitted to be irresistible. The internal offer a series of subsidiary proofs. The overthrow of objections completes the demonstration. What follows ? Man receives by faith the testimony,

the well-authenticated testimony, of God. Faith is the medium between the invisible truths which the Bible reveals, and the human soul ; the link between the testimony of God without us, and the mind of man to whom it is made. Just as the senses are the medium between external objects and the human understanding ; and as consciousness is the medium in the case of things taking place in the interior of the heart ; and as reasoning is, in matters within the scope of the human faculties—so is faith the medium between truths presented to us on the testimony of God and our minds ; faith places them within the sphere of vision, makes them palpable, enables us to avail ourselves of them. It is like the telescope to the natural eye ; it brings near in their real magnitude and proportion, those objects of an invisible world, which reason could only dimly discern by its innate powers and the aid of tradition, or not discern at all.

All this is perfectly clear, I think, even to the youngest person before me. There is no difference between faith in human affairs and divine, as respects the act of the mind on the object presented to it. The object in each case is testimony ; the degree of affiance, indeed, differs as greatly as divine and human, as fallible and infallible authority. But the act of the mind is in each case essentially the same.

The great practical distinction between faith, as exercised on human testimony and on divine, arises from the fallen state of man, and the peculiar nature of the discoveries contained in the Holy Scriptures.

If the Bible were a mere theory of abstract science, or a cold historical narrative, or a simple rule of morals, there never would have been any dispute about the nature of the faith which receives it ; because there would have been nothing in it contrary to the inclinations of man, and little surpassing his reasoning powers. But many of the truths of Scripture are so contrary to his pride and worldly lusts ; they so far

surmount his low and limited capacities; they demand such sacrifices of prejudices and passions, that no evidence is sufficient to induce a cordial belief, till the mind is prepared by prevenient² grace. Man is proud, and sensual, and refuses to apply the same act of the mind which he is employing daily in matters of human witness, to the reception of divine.³

This forms the ground of the distinction between a living and a dead faith. A dead faith is a cold speculative assent to the truth of Scripture, with some general acknowledgment of its principal facts and doctrines as propounded in the creeds of Christian churches. It may include a theoretical acquaintance with all the particular doctrines of which these creeds are composed; but it neither obeys them in the affections of the heart nor the actions of the life. Accordingly, as we should say that a man who professed to believe in the obligations of municipal law, who studied them all his life, and made himself acquainted with their frame-work; and yet never revered, never obeyed them, never enjoyed the security they afforded, but violated them continually, and incurred the penalties they imposed; had merely a dead faith in these obligations: so we say, that he who professes to believe in the Christian Revelation, who admits its truth, studies it all his life, and becomes acquainted with its frame-work; and yet never reverences, never obeys it, never enjoys the blessings it promises, but violates its commands, and incurs the penalties it threatens; has only a dead faith in Christianity.

Faith, to deserve the name, must be a living, influential principle, seated in the heart as well as the understanding, taking possession of the whole man,

² I use this word as now less ambiguous than *preventing*.

³ "Perhaps it is the constant resistance which is made by the flesh to the claims of a spiritual religion and the consequent disinclination to a full and firm belief, which renders faith so eminently a Christian virtue."—Bishop Blomfield.

leading him to think, and act, and feel agreeably to the truth and importance of what is brought to his knowledge ; it must call forth fear, hope, desire, aversion, love, gratitude ; just exactly as faith in human testimony does, in proportion to the truth and importance of what is thus apprehended.

A man is tossed in a bark upon the wide ocean ; all is dark ; the sea rages ; the tempest howls ; death impends. He says he possesses a compass in the virtue of which he fully believes ; yet he never consults it, never reposes any trust in its guidance, never directs his course according to its indications—he has only a dead faith. A living faith would have led him to act unreservedly on the compass in which he said he believed, to look at it every moment, to disregard the opinions of the passengers or crew ; to follow its directions at all risks, and thus wait with fortitude and calmness for the abating of the storm.

No doubt would ever have been raised concerning this point, if it had not been for that very corruption of man, which the gospel is revealed to cure.

And the case will be more clear, if we remember the occasion upon which this faith is demanded. For consider the glory of that God who reveals the Scriptures, the subject matter of the Revelation, and the state of man to whom it is made, and you will see that a living and efficacious faith, a faith including a repose and trust of the whole soul, with all its faculties and powers ; a faith sought for by earnest prayer ; a faith produced by the influences of grace in the heart, is essentially necessary.

For who is the AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE ? Is he a man like ourselves ? No ; it is a Revelation from the great and glorious God, whose perfections surpass all human understanding. A message from such a being, whose is our felicity for time and eternity, should be received with a reverent, a grateful exercise of the whole understanding and heart. How does

an obedient subject receive a message from his earthly sovereign ?

And what does **THIS REVELATION REGARD** ? Is it a matter of secondary moment ? Is it information about the creation of the world merely, and the order of nature ? Is it an historical document about the series of ages ? Is it an accumulation of ceremonies ? No ; it is concerned in no such limited topics. No ; the Revelation of the great God to man regards matters of eternal moment—man's fall and guilt, redemption by the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, a sanctifying Spirit, the operations of grace on the heart, the love of God restored, preparation for death and judgment. It reveals the immortality of the soul. It reveals an invisible world. It communicates truth vital, momentous, indispensable. What, then, is the faith with which such a Revelation should be obeyed ? How would a herald of peace be received by a rebellious province, if he brought tidings of pardon by the intervention of the only-begotten Son of the offended Monarch ?

And what is the **STATE OF MAN** ? Is he not a dying creature ? Is he not wandering in the darkness of this world ? Is he not the sport of folly, prejudice, concupiscence ? Can he do any thing to deliver himself ? How does a traveller perishing in a desert, seize the hand of a deliverer ? How does the father of a family, roused by the guardian of the night, act upon the testimony of the instant danger of conflagration and death ?

Such, then, must be the nature of the faith by which we receive the Revelation of the great God. A lifeless, tame, unmeaning assent will avail us nothing, but to mock God and increase our condemnation. It is essentially unbelief—it is the same state of heart as infidelity itself.

But how far do the statements of Scripture support this representation ? What is the nature of faith as

expressed in the language of Revelation itself? Every step in our remarks is fully sustained. The principle on which faith in Christianity is to rest, is that on which, as we have observed, men are daily acting; "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." The state of mind which rejects the testimony, is represented as a distrust of God's declarations, and a virtual imputation of falsehood on his express communications; "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar." The repose and affiance which faith involves, is expressed by an allusion to the custom of affixing a seal to what we most surely credit; "He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true." The necessity of the heart and affections being engaged in it, is strongly insisted on; "If thou believest with all thine heart—With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." The vivid apprehensions it conveys to the mind—the link it forms between man and the invisible things promised is also stated; "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Its more immediate reference to the commanding truth of redemption in Jesus Christ, is perpetually held forth; "This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." The insufficiency of a mere barren assent, as opposed to this heartfelt and living principle, is awfully illustrated by the case of the fallen spirits; "THE DEVILS ALSO BELIEVE AND TREMBLE." The grace necessary to fallen man, in order that he may heartily believe, is strongly stated, both as to the perception of the testimony which is the object of faith, and as to the state of mind from which faith springs; "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name;

which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." ⁴

The first thing, then, which man has to do after he has examined the Evidences of Divine Revelation, is to implore of God a right disposition to believe—to seek the aid of his Holy Spirit—to beg of God to lift up the natural faith or capacity of believing, which as an old writer speaks, ⁵ lies in the rubbish of the fall, which is centered on the creature, can discern and repose on human testimony, but shrinks and hesitates about divine; which cannot see spiritual things, nor raise itself up to the communications of the Creator—to lift up this natural believing faculty and make it capable of the effort of obedience to the Scriptures.

But let us consider,

II. THE REASONABLENESS OF OUR BEING CALLED ON FOR SUCH A FAITH, AFTER HAVING ADMITTED THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF CHRISTIANITY.

For it is nothing but the resigning and making over the understanding and heart to God, after being convinced that he has condescended to speak to us. And what can be so perfectly agreeable to the dictates of right reason? The favourite attempt of infidelity to oppose reason to faith, will be found to be a mere stratagem. Faith is itself an exercise of reason in concurrence with the affections, upon the strongest grounds on which an accountable being can act. Faith is so far, therefore, from extinguishing or opposing reason, that it elevates, establishes, purifies it, gives it new materials, and employs it for new purposes. It is reason which conducts us to Revelation, and opens to us the door of the divine sanctuary; there it commits us to the arms of faith, leaves us under her empire, and attends us afterwards only as a

⁴ John v. 9—12. John iii. 33. Acts viii. 37. Rom. x. 10. Heb. xi. 1. James ii. 19. 1 Cor. ii. 14. John i. 12, 13.

⁵ Polhill.

subordinate minister. Guided by reason, I discover that Jesus Christ and his apostles have appeared on earth, and have given manifest proofs of their divine mission. I have for these facts, the same kind of certainty as I have for the existence of Cæsar and his conquests in Gaul, or any other events in history, of which no human being ever doubted. Upon these, the examination of the Christian is fixed. These facts reason discusses and searches to the bottom. But when she is once convinced of the divine authority of Jesus Christ and his apostles, this same reason commands him imperiously to submit himself to that teaching, and to abase his feeble understanding before the supreme intelligence."

The question here divides itself into two branches, the submission of the soul to the discoveries of Revelation; and the necessity of divine assistance, in order to do this; and the reasonableness of both will be most evident on the footing of the very Christianity which enjoins them.

1. For, as to the discoveries of the Christian religion, the obvious dictate of conscience is, that man should unreservedly bow to what God is pleased to reveal—this, and this only, is the right, the reasonable course.

"What is reasoning, or a number of propositions consecutive in a certain order," says the latest of our moral philosophers,⁷ on a subject not at all relating to religion, and therefore the more free from the suspicion of partiality—"but a continued series of analytical operations, developing the elements of our thoughts. In every proposition, that which is concluded is a part of that of which it is affirmed. The chymist analyses the substances about us; he may give them new names, or detect in them new elements, but he cannot change their nature. In reasoning, there is a

⁶ Frayssinous.

⁷ Dr. Thomas Brown.

similar analysis, which presents to us the elements of our own former conceptions. Reasoning, if at all intelligible, must begin with some conception already familiar to us, in which it asserts something to be contained, and proceeds only to trace similar relations. A new truth of this kind is not so much added to us, as evolved from the primary truth already familiar. It is not as if new objects were presented to us to be seen, but as if our intellectual senses were quickened and rendered more acute, so as to perceive clearly what we saw dimly, or not even dimly, before; though we might have seen it as now, if we had not been too dull of vision to perceive what was in our hands."

What, then, has reason to say, when Divine Revelation throws in new materials, brings to light new facts, discovers new relations in which we stand, erects a new standard of sin and holiness, makes known to us new dangers, and calls us to new duties? Her province is widened. She has to set to work on the new truths brought to her knowledge, and controul the conclusions and practical judgments deduced from her previous narrow and penurious stock, by the enlarged furniture and elements now before her. Her office being, not to supply the mind with ideas, but to judge of the agreement or disagreement between those already received, it can of course only exercise itself upon such elements as are before it. Men reason, not only in proportion to the strength of their reasoning faculties, but to the store of materials laid in to reason upon, and the degree of care bestowed in training up their several faculties to the habit or art of perceiving, recollecting, inferring. Shut up all the senses, reason cannot exert herself for want of materials; open one sense, and she can work on the ideas of that class and no other. Open a second, and her sphere is enlarged, and she expatiates in a new field of knowledge.*

* Deism Revealed.

The late Bishop of Calcutta, Dr. James, illustrates in a

When Revelation then comes in, it is like opening a new sense to man. He discerns a new world. He finds that he stands in new relations to God—that new facts have taken place, and new duties are imposed on him.

So that we may say with Mr. Locke, that “reason is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of our faculties. Revelation is natural reli-

lively manner the instant change in all our grounds of reasoning, which new facts or new information may occasion.

“One single new fact, one single new principle, may throw light on a whole class of difficulties. There may be periods of Christianity coming on which may unveil much that is now dark and perplexing. What do we know of God’s mind? What does a subject of an earthly prince know of that human prince’s mind?

“Let us ask whether the sheep that is folded and tended with so much care, can possibly divine the real cause of all that is done by man with regard to his welfare. If we were to suppose the animal gifted with a certain degree of sagacity, we may imagine it might possibly arrive at certain conclusions; it might conjecture, from seeing the fate of its fellow-creatures, that itself was only reserved to be killed hereafter; that it was served with additional food, only to make its carcass larger when killed; but it never could discover that its flesh was designed only for the food of man, or that the candle in the shepherd’s lanthorn was made from sheep’s fat, or his coat from its wool. Suppose, however, another event. Let a man come and remove this sheep from the pasture where it grazed to other pastures; a circumstance that, as far as it had any observation of such matters, might have happened often before, without any material consequence having been the result. Yet it might happen that the man was a thief, and the act of removal an act of felony, and the man to be put to death in consequence. Now if the sheep could reason with ever so much sagacity, yet from the data which alone would have been afforded it, it could never arrive at any just conclusion in such a case; for though the act concerned itself, yet it referred to principles of which it was not only ignorant, but with which it was wholly unconnected.”—*Semi-Sceptic*, p. 65.

gion enlarged, and a new set of discoveries communicated immediately by God, which reason vouches the truth of by the testimony and proof it gives that they came from God."

To appeal, then, to the moral sense or to conscience, as affording any thing like a ground of objection to the matter of Christianity, is to overthrow all the authority of Revelation. "Conscience and reason, or that modification of it which we call the moral sense, do not furnish laws which we should obey, but point out when we agree with that rule of action which had previously been established as our guide; whether that rule be the law of the land, or the precepts of a particular philosophy, or the customs of society, or the commands of God. Reason and conscience are casuists; Revelation alone is the law."⁹

The believer, then, reasons from the Bible, as from self-evident truths. When men say that they can believe nothing that is unreasonable, we agree with them—but the question is, what is unreasonable? If God gives us a Revelation of his will, it is most reasonable for me to believe the things contained in it, though I may not understand them in all their parts. To object to the unreasonableness of this or that fact, this or that doctrine, as unbelievers commonly do, is to suppress the main step in the argument—the Revelation which intervenes; if there were no revelation, to believe certain things might be just as absurd, as it is now fit and becoming, because we receive them on the authority of a divine religion.

"Having, now," says the greatest master of reason perhaps, which our country ever saw, "with our small bark of knowledge, sailed over and surrounded the globe of the sciences, as well the Old World as the New, there is another part to be viewed—inspired theology; to survey which, we must quit the small vessel

⁹ Bishop John Bird Sumner.

of human reason, and put ourselves on board the ship of the church, which alone possesses the divine needle for justly shaping our course. If we should believe only such things as are agreeable to our reason, we assent to the matter and not to the author ; and therefore the more absurd and incredible any divine mysteries are, so much the greater honour do we do to God in believing them, and so much the more noble the victory of faith."¹⁰

2. But we have dwelt too long on this topic. We pass to the NECESSITY OF DIVINE AID IN ORDER TO BELIEVE ARIGHT—the reasonableness of which rests on the same footing of the authority of the Revelation. For if I am to submit myself unreservedly to the divine discoveries of it, I am most of all to submit to those declarations of human depravity, and of the need of the agency of the Holy Spirit, without which, all the other parts of the record will be of little avail to me. The same book which calls me to believe, tells me that I am a corrupt, perverse, prejudiced creature ; and that true faith is the gift and operation of the Holy Spirit. I am bound, then, to submit to this statement, and implore the proffered grace. Till this healing influence restores the moral frame, no real and vital trust in the peculiar truths of Christianity can be exercised. "The man is at a loss for the simple conceptions which are the materials of the argument of which Revelation treats. It is not in the power of reasoning to supply those ideas themselves. Reasoning cannot create the primary elements of the question. It can only cement them together."¹¹

Nothing, then, is so reasonable as to follow the divine directions, and seek for grace to produce the faith to which Revelation addresses itself. Nor can any thing be more becoming man, more agreeable to his accountable and immortal being, more dignified and

¹⁰ Lord Bacon.

¹¹ Chalmers.

elevating to his intellectual nature, than to bow implicitly to God, and receive all his will with the silence and submission of conscious ignorance and guilt. To act otherwise, is acting the most unreasonable, as well as the most rebellious part; for unless men pray humbly for a vigorous and living faith, they will find out a way to believe only so much of the Bible as they please. Their reason remains under the tyranny of the passions. Instead of being the governing faculty in the mind, she is like a weak eastern prince, dethroned by her usurping subjects, and that on account of her inability to enforce her dictates; so that for once that she issues any orders of her own, she is a thousand times either coaxed or compelled to lend her name and authority, as Prince Henry III. when in the hands of Montfort and the Barons, to the greatest extravagancies and crimes.¹²

And, indeed, where the question of the Evidences of Christianity has been candidly examined, the very same temper of mind which led to a fair balancing of testimonies in every step of the argument, will go on to operate when the truth of Christianity is established. It will examine what the faith is with which the religion is to be received; it will perceive the difference between a speculative assent, and a cordial and thorough belief in the matters of Revelation; and when it discerns the reasonableness of exercising such a trust, it will discern also the fitness of submitting to God's directions as to the manner of attaining it; and finding it is described as the gift of God, it will pray and earnestly seek for the communication of the gift from the source of all light and grace.

In fact, it is highly reasonable for man, in every important undertaking, and therefore most of all in the reception of Christianity, to be dependent on God, to feel his weakness and ignorance, and to rely on di-

¹² Deism Revealed.

vine aid. Even natural religion teaches us man's feebleness. Revelation opens that disease to the bottom. Revelation proceeds on the fall and corruption of man. Revelation declares that faith must be a living principle, operating upon the whole soul. Revelation pronounces the Holy Ghost to be the divine agent who produces such a faith. And nothing can be so clear as the reasonableness of all this ; the first step in the argument being granted, that the Revelation requiring this faith and promising this grace which produces it, has come from God.

But let us consider, as we proposed,

III. THE EXTENT TO WHICH, FROM THE NATURE OF THE CASE, FAITH SHOULD BE CARRIED.

For the case is this. We receive a Revelation from Almighty God with a heartfelt repose and acquiescence in the divine testimony. We do this cheerfully as the most reasonable and becoming act of an accountable being to its Creator revealing his will. We seek the grace necessary for believing aright. Then surely the utmost care is necessary not to go beyond, nor stop short in a concern of such importance. We must be much on our guard not to add to, nor diminish from, the testimony on which our faith rests. We must be watchful not to impose our opinions or errors on the divine record. For in proportion as faith resigns us unreservedly to the directions of Christianity, we must see that it be indeed to Christianity that we thus yield up our whole understanding and heart. This is demanded by the very nature of the case.

We travel an unknown road ; dangers beset us on all hands ; precipices, and morasses, and bye-paths present themselves. We have an unerring guide ; but then we must follow sedulously his conduct. We must not overrun, not linger behind, not start on either side of the path wherein he leads us.

If the case were different ; if we were on our own bottom, or treating a subject of human cognizance, or temporary interest, errors would be of less moment ; but in a divine Revelation, where we know nothing but what we are taught—where much is new, mysterious, sublime, incomprehensible, we cannot act too warily.

The extent, then, to which faith must be carried, is such as to embrace all the parts of the Bible ; to give to each its relative importance ; to stop, with minute and watchful conscientiousness, where the Revelation stops ; and to express ourselves as much as possible in the very words of the divinely-inspired volume.

1. We must extend our faith to EVERY PART OF THE REVELATION made to us by Almighty God, not excepting any, but considering the whole entire book as one complete communication made by God to man, for the most important purposes. We are to explore the Scriptures as a mine of precious ore, where the vein runs in every direction, and where a new source of riches opens continually on every side, and when we least expect it.

We are not merely to believe, with a general faith, in all that the Scripture reveals, without entering into detail, or understanding the particular truths of which it consists ; but we are to pursue out the subject, and go into all its ramifications, and believe explicitly in each part of the matter of Revelation.

The Scriptures relate facts which God has confirmed ; they contain doctrines which God has immediately inspired ; they hold forth promises and assurances concerning the future, which God has engaged to accomplish ; they lay down rules of conduct, which God has prescribed ; they make discoveries of mysteries in the divine nature, and will, and purposes, and operations, which God has been pleased to attest.

They contain sanctions and threatenings, which God has seen fit to pronounce.

These various elements of truth, are partly involved in the history of the patriarchal age, in the lives of saints and prophets, in the rise and progress of the Jewish nation, and in the series of the history of the kings of Israel and Judah; and they are partly found in the divine poems and psalms, indited by inspired men. Many truths, again, are conveyed in the types and ceremonies of the law; and others in the discourses of the prophets. Then, the gospels contain large portions of truth; and the acts of the apostles, and the epistles, yet larger, being the final development of the Revelation. Now faith marches through the whole land, and sees what are the truths communicated in each part of the Revelation.

Faith regards the perfections of God, his righteousness, his law, his government, his decrees; the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and misery, the fall of man, the evil and desert of sin, the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart, the immortality of the soul, an eternal state of happiness and misery.

Faith especially regards the testimony of God concerning his Son. It respects the exceeding great and precious promises made in him; and the blessings of pardon, justification, adoption into God's family, the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of everlasting life, which are bestowed as the purchase of his death.

Faith becomes also the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;"¹³ it penetrates the invisible world, lays heaven and hell open to our view, contemplates the hosts of good and evil spirits, with which we are surrounded, and looks forward to eternity and the day of judgment, as just at hand.

¹³ Heb. xi. 1.

These are merely some capital points ; but faith receives every subordinate one also, and omits nothing that God has thought fit to communicate.

2. But not only so : this principle of faith gives to every part of Revelation **THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE** which it finds assigned to it. There is an analogy, a harmony, a proportion, in the divine truths. They compose a whole ; they are united with each other ; they spring one from another, as we have frequently observed ; they are revealed for certain purposes, with certain limitations, and in connexion with certain preceding and following truths. Faith regards not only the doctrine, but the manner in which it is communicated, the frequency of its occurrence, the use to which it is applied, the proportion in which its several parts stand to each other.

The more we examine Scripture, the more we find that its instructions are not all of equal importance to us, though none are unimportant ; and we must determine, from Scripture itself, what is important, and what less so. Some truths are more obvious, more elementary than others. Some are primary, if you regard them as in God ; but secondary and matters of inference, if you regard them as affecting man. Some are suited to one age of life, and one degree of progress, and some to another. Therefore all is to be revered, followed, obeyed, in proportion as it is more or less applicable to our own circumstances and duties.

The moment we gather any principle from Revelation, and find it recurring throughout the Scriptures—for example, the infinite evil of sin—we are to admit it as a principle in all our other studies of the divine book.

The moment we find any fact declared to be of a commanding nature, and to influence all the Revelation—for instance, the incarnation of the Son of God

—we are to give it its position in all our conceptions of truth.

The moment we find any doctrine explicitly declared in the last and concluding part of the Revelation, the apostolic epistles, to be the leading doctrine of the whole gospel—for example, the cross and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the justification which is by faith in his obedience unto death—we are to give it the like prominence, and let all other truths be ranged around it, and illustrate it.

The moment we find any state of mind and temper to be characteristic of the evangelical dispensation—charity, for instance—we are to give it that prominent station.

Thus faith “rightly divides the word of truth ;”¹⁴ places every thing in its place ; not only follows Revelation in the detail, but in the disposition and relative importance of its contents.

3. But, more than this, faith stops, with minute and watchful conscientiousness, where the Revelation stops. Though it may think other truths follow from those revealed, yet it attributes not the same authority to those deductions, which it assigns to the revealed doctrines themselves. The Christian must draw inferences ; he must bring out conclusions from premises, where the premises are strong and clear ; but if the premises are in the Bible, and the inference not, he considers the one of divine, the other of human, authority. He treads with such awe on the unknown land, that he dares not venture beyond what God has explicitly revealed. He knows not what may be involved in a single step beyond the record.

Every thing is relative in the world and in the holy Scriptures, corresponding with our faculties, and

¹⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 15.

answering the divine purposes in the government of man. Certain impressions are made upon us, according to our faculties ; not with reference to the essences and qualities of things, but to what they are with respect to us, and the impression they make upon us. All objects strike our organs of sense, and speak to us in that language ; which is the only one we can understand. God is pleased to address us in the same manner. If men were constructed differently, objects would make a different impression on us. *Quicquid recipitur, recipitur modo recipientis.* We have no right to demand information as to the essences of things, which God conceals. God represents himself to us according to the relations in human life with which we are acquainted, as Judge, Rewarder, Guide, Father, Deliverer, Benefactor. The truths in Scripture, therefore, are to be minutely and exactly followed, as they are there revealed, without superaddition or subtraction. The divinity of Christ, the atonement of his death, the person and grace of the Holy Spirit, faith receives as truths contained in the Scriptures ; though we cannot comprehend them. But what do we comprehend ? The being and attributes of God ? Infinity ? Faith, therefore, keeps closely to the limits of the divine manifestation.

This point is of the last moment. Much concerning the fall of man, the decrees and purposes of God, the operations of grace, are of a nature to demand constant caution, lest human reasoning should attribute to its own inferences, the authority which belongs only to the divinely-inspired premises. The inferences may be right or wrong. They are not in the record ; and faith, therefore, insists not on them as divine.

The progress of true faith in the present day very much appears in its following more simply the several parts of the divine word, without attempting to deduce inferences or frame systems from them. In religion, as in natural philosophy, men must be students

and inquirers. Formerly they made hypotheses about the laws of nature; they thought they understood the essences of things. At length they acknowledge they know nothing beyond the phenomena.

Now, in Christianity, the declarations of the Bible are our phenomena, our first principles. As faith is more simple, it acknowledges it knows as little of God and his will and counsels, abstractedly and hypothetically and universally, as we profess is the case with regard to his works. Faith confines herself to the record, and stops where that stops.

Still, as in philosophy, axioms are framed, laws of philosophizing laid down, principles adopted, facts accumulated, generalized, and established as maxims of natural science; so in the Bible faith has found her axioms, her laws, her principles, her facts.

But, as in natural philosophy, these are always referable to first principles, and every thing is tried and examined by them; so is it in religion. The Bible is still our standard; and every thing there found is a part of those first principles to which all subsequent advances must be referred.

And as there are discoveries made in the natural world, by cautious observation and simple obedience to fact and experiment; so, in the Bible, faith, by the same means, makes continual discoveries; not, indeed, in the great features of truth—for these rest upon a few facts, expounded by a few main doctrines—but in the detail, the application, the effects, and use of truth.

4. And this leads the Christian to FOLLOW, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, THE LANGUAGE, as well as the sentiments of the holy Scriptures. The disposition to acquiesce in God's Revelation is so entire, and the fear of overstepping the limits of the record is so wakeful, that the true Christian naturally and almost necessarily adopts the expressions, delights in the phraseology, employs in preference the words, and appeals perpetually to the authority of the sacred word. The

Bible is a book by itself. Its sanctity, its new and heavenly doctrines, the inspiration under which it was written, invest it with a peculiarity which no human wisdom can imitate. It has been uniformly found, that when the faith of the church has declined, the language of Scripture has become neglected. The Bible was seldom cited during the dark ages. At the Reformation the use of its terms and expressions revived with a love for its main doctrines.

In fact, the Revelation itself provides for this. The apostles oppose the wisdom of God to the wisdom of men, and the words of the Holy Ghost, to those of human invention. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."¹⁵ The same direction is involved in the commands to "search the Scriptures," to "hide them in our heart," to make them "our counsellors," to "meditate therein day and night," to "delight in them above gold and precious stones," to account them "sweeter than honey, yea than the honeycomb," to "rejoice in them as one that findeth great spoil." He that does this, insensibly adopts their manner of expression, their turn of thought, their way of stating things; his mind is cast into the mould of the Bible, and he labours to receive more and more its exact form and impress.

Such, then, being the nature, reasonableness, and extent of faith, a reflection or two may be offered, before we proceed to our conclusion, on the tranquillity of mind which it produces; and on the necessary influence it exerts on the whole life of a Christian.

1. Observe THE TRANQUILLITY which this faith produces. There is an acquiescence of mind in divine truth, a cheerful resignation of the understanding and

¹⁵ 1 Cor. ii. 10.

will to the testimony of God. Thus one great end of Revelation is attained.

The perturbation, the forebodings of conscience, the apprehension of futurity, the dread of the almighty Arbiter of the universe, the uncertainty of human opinion, the tossings and tempests of conjecture and prejudice, are all terminated. Faith settles every thing. The truths of Scripture are as exactly adapted to this exercise of a contrite and humble mind, as the light of heaven is to the natural eye. The same divine Spirit, which indited the Scriptures, knew what was in man, and disposes his heart to receive what is revealed. The result is a tranquillity of soul, arising from a correspondence between the faculty and the object. Reliance on the inspired Scriptures brings that calm joy, which the revelation of such important truths might be expected to produce.

The discovery of truth, of whatever kind, is delightful to man.¹⁶ Mathematical knowledge, physical, metaphysical, create repose in a certain way, from the pleasure of discovering what is new and useful in the worlds of science. But in divine truth there is that repose which springs from the impression of the greatness of the mercy vouchsafed in Revelation, of the magnitude of the truths communicated both in themselves and to man, of the high and elevated and purifying effects produced, of the bright and cheerful hopes awakened. The soul attains its rest. Faith completes the noblest instinct of man, that natural pulse which he has after truth and happiness. It meets his inmost wants, it agrees with his accountable nature, and with all his primary duties to Almighty God.¹⁷ Faith rectifies, as it were, the illusions of vision; brings forward into near view those eternal things which, from their remoteness, are apt to be

¹⁶ La logique est un besoin de l'esprit, comme la religion est un besoin de l'ame.

¹⁷ Lecture XIV.

either wholly overlooked or appear but faintly in the utmost bounds of the horizon; and removes backward and reduces to their true comparative size the objects of the present life, which are apt to fill the human eye and assume a false magnitude from their vicinity.¹⁶ And this is the source of tranquillity.

Faith especially fixes the mind on one grand object, in which all the lines of revealed truth converge, as in their centre, **THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST**; and thus brings us to the fountain of felicity. The very conviction of our own ignorance, and of the infinite wisdom and truth of God, promotes the same calmness of spirit. I am in a dark and sinful world; I am surrounded with mysteries; but my heavenly Father has revealed to me a sufficient guide; things are all, practically speaking, well; he assures me all shall be cleared up in a future world. I leave them with him; I follow by faith in the track of patriarchs and prophets, evangelists and apostles; my mind is tranquil, and resigns itself to God; I give over conjecturing, reasoning, disputing, in order to **BELIEVE**.

2. Nor is it difficult to perceive how this faith is **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**. For as the eye receives the light, and directs the whole body, so faith, the eye of the soul, receives the light of Revelation and directs the life. All depends upon it. Truth operates on the heart only as it is appropriated by this principle. We wonder not that it is described as the grace which apprehends the promises of Christ for justification, which works in a way of love to the things revealed, which overcomes the smiles and frowns of the world, which purifies the heart, which produces uniform and cheerful obedience. It cannot be otherwise. If it be a living and active principle, it is the reliance of an enlightened and renewed heart upon the testimony of Almighty God; and every act of it ex-

¹⁶ Wilberforce.

cites the correspondent affections, and produces the becoming conduct. As it respects the testimony of God in Revelation itself, it is the first link of union between truth and the heart of man; as it respects the promises of forgiveness in a Saviour, it is the instrument of justification;¹⁹ as it regards the entire compass of truth and duty, of which Christianity consists, it is the principle of the whole life and behaviour; as it looks forward into futurity, it is the parent of hope, and the spring of love, patience, enterprize.

Let me, then, in conclusion, press on all before me the importance of examining themselves whether they have a lively faith; of imploring the grace of the Holy Spirit to impart to them this blessing, or increase it if they already possess it; and of ever retaining that humility of mind which the highest degrees of it are best calculated to enforce.

I. EXAMINE YOURSELVES, my young friends, whether your faith be living and influential or not; a mistake here is very common and most destructive. That you assent to the truth of Christianity I doubt not. That you are in some measure impressed with the force of the evidences which we have been considering, I am ready to admit. That you have some knowledge of the main doctrines and duties of Revelation, and some persuasion of the importance of them, I allow. But, I ask, is your faith such as the Scrip-

¹⁹ The act of faith as justifying, and justifying alone, and yet as standing, in other views, in connexion with the whole Christian life, has been thus illustrated. While the poor criminal, who fled to the altar for refuge, laid hold of the horns of it with his hands alone, his heart would beat, his blood circulate, and his other limbs and senses perform their proper functions. Thus the penitent sinner by faith alone lays hold of Christ; yet his soul is alive to God: and all the graces of the Christian life are at the same time exercised according to their proper nature and functions.

tures describe that of the first converts to have been ? Does it consist of those elementary qualities, lead to those feelings, produce those fruits, issue in that tranquillity of heart, which it did in the apostolic times ? Does it bring not only knowledge, but love ; not only assent, but persuasion ; not only profession in words, but obedience in the life and conduct ?

Alas ! too many before me have, I fear, no true faith. They have never sought for it by fervent prayer. They have never appropriated to their own use the great truths of Revelation. They have never seen the glory, and reposed on the sacrifice of the Son of God. They have never built on him as the sure foundation of hope. They have never looked to him, as the bitten Israelite to the brazen serpent, for healing and life. They have never fled to him as the manslayer fled to his city of refuge. They have never sought deliverance and salvation in him, as Noah entered the ark and escaped the threatened deluge. Truth lies torpid and inactive in their understanding. It never penetrates the soul, never rouses to exertion, never warms with love, never constrains by the secret charm of gratitude for benefits received.

No ; you are yet dead and lifeless as to God. Your faith is a mere speculative act of the understanding. You never read with devout prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the records of Revelation ; it is neither your companion nor your delight. Any book is more interesting ; any tidings produce more impression. And is this the manner in which you receive a communication from your Creator, your Benefactor, your Sovereign, your future Judge ? Is this the return you offer for the condescension and grace of a divine Revelation ? Is this the use you make of the stupendous discoveries of eternity, and the infinite blessings of redemption ? Is this the way you prepare for an everlasting state ? What ! you hear of God, and never believe in him ; you hear of a Saviour,

and never receive him ; you hear of the fallen and guilty condition of man, and never tremble on account of it ; you hear of heaven and hell, and never prepare to attain the one and escape the other.

“Awake,” then, “thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.”²⁰ Remember, a mere notional faith is a mockery of God, a frustrating of all the ends of Revelation, an aggravation of your guilt, a resigning yourself to the same punishment with those fallen spirits who only believe and tremble.

But you are aroused to some consideration. You are convinced that your present nominal Christianity will not suffice. You ask me how you can obtain a lively faith. I direct you then—

II. TO IMPORE THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO IMPART TO YOU THIS BLESSING. A true faith, like a true love to God, can be obtained in no other way. And our heavenly Father has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. It is the capital blessing of Revelation, next to the gift of a Saviour ; or rather, it is the blessing through which the gift of a Saviour and every other gift becomes truly beneficial to us. The influences of grace, like dew in the natural world, soften, penetrate, and fertilize. The hardest heart yields to this sacred power. The will is changed ; the importance of truth is perceived ; the mind is directed with a strong self-application to the consideration of the doctrines it had before passed over ; the emotions of fear, alarm, remorse, penitence, are awakened ; the soul becomes contrite. In such a heart, as in a genial and fruitful soil, faith quickly grows up. The man who had been exercising the natural capacity of believing on human testimony all his life, and had always been roused, directed, animated, consoled, alarmed by it, according

²⁰ Eph. v. 14.

to the matter of that testimony ; whilst he had never exerted that capacity upon divine Revelation, nor once yielded his heart and conscience to its discoveries ; this man begins to come to himself, to act as a reasonable being, to repose on the word of the eternal God that faith which he had been previously refusing to do.

All is now hopeful ; life appears ; he now earnestly prays for the grace and assistance of which he feels deeply the need ; he seizes his Bible ; he reads it with new eyes ; it seems to speak to him individually ; he receives with the simplicity and affection of a child all that his heavenly Father declares ; he applies truth to its proper purposes. The first is to lay him low in contrition for sin ; the next is to fix his eye on the meritorious cross of his Saviour ; the third is to produce peace of conscience, by the forgiveness of sins. The following steps of love, gratitude, obedience, separation from the world, holy mortification of sin, follow.

Go on, then, in this course. Implore daily the aids of grace to repair a decayed, and succour a trembling, and confirm a feeble faith. Faith is a constant victory over interposing doubts. It is a conflict, in one form or other, with the objections and fallacies which we considered in our last Lectures.²¹ It is a conquest over the dictates of mere human wisdom, and the conclusions of mere external perception. It unites us with Christ, takes up the cross, endures as seeing him who is invisible, realises eternal and future blessings—and “ looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”²²

You must, therefore, continually depend on the succours of grace to strengthen in you the HABIT OF FAITH, and preserve it in life and vigour ; to give you the impression of its REASONABLENESS, after having

²¹ Lectures XXI, XXII.

²² 2 Cor. iv. 18.

once admitted the truth of Christianity ; and to lead you to exercise it to all the **EXTENT** which the nature of the case demands, and apply it to every part of Scripture.

Thus will you grow in faith more and more ; interposing doubts and objections will less annoy you ; the temptations of Satan will less prevail ; nay, the **SHIELD OF FAITH WILL QUENCH THE FIERY DARTS OF THE DEVIL.**²³

III. And in this progress, you will learn ever to **RETAIN THAT HUMILITY OF MIND**, which the highest degrees of faith are the best calculated to produce. For this most peculiarly becomes us in a state of discipline and comparative darkness, like that in which we now are. The divisions of the church have much arisen from a want of the due union of humility with faith. And yet the very nature of this grace should, and will, in proportion as it is genuine, produce lowliness of mind.

Humility is the very handmaid of true faith ; the only soil where it will flourish. While pride, and presumption, and unholy curiosity engage the heart, doubts prevail, objections retain their force, faith cannot enter. And if these evils ever regain their influence after they have been dethroned, faith languishes, doubts thicken, objections recur ; the strength of the soul is gone ; eternal realities fade from the view ; temporal interests assume a false magnitude ; Satan, the great adversary, gains an advantage over us ; and sensual passions are at hand, as instruments of his snares.

Let us, then, walk in humility of heart. This is the lesson of the entire revelation of the Gospel ; and more especially of the subject to which we have been now attending.

²³ Eph. vi. 16.

We should be thankful, indeed, for the sure testimony of God, and for the least measure of true faith in it. This blessing is incalculable. Compared with the darkness of nature, Revelation is a blazing light; the Saviour is the Sun of Righteousness; the gospel a day of illumination and joy. But still, as respects our own imperfect apprehension of these blessings, our dangers from our spiritual adversaries, and the brighter discoveries of eternity, we are in an obscure and confused state. "We walk by faith, not by sight."²⁴ "We see through a glass darkly,"²⁵—in an enigma—we speak only as children; we know partially. We are making our way through the night of this world; faith is only as a lamp glimmering in a sepulchre, sufficient to guide our lowly path, but never intended to administer to our self-confidence and pride. It has its best effect when it leads us to repose on the "sure word of prophecy, and thereunto to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts."²⁶

²⁴ 2 Cor. v. 7.²⁵ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.²⁶ 2 Pet. i. 19.

LECTURE XXIV.

THE SOUND INTERPRETATION OF THE RECORDS
OF REVELATION.

 2 TIM. ii. 15.
Rightly dividing the word of truth.

HAVING considered the faith with which the divine records of Christianity are to be received, it is necessary, in the next place, to offer some remarks on the just method of interpreting the meaning of those records which such a faith implies.

For, in an age of literary innovation and intellectual daring, men may admit, generally, the Christian religion, and even pass over, without remark, the description of a true faith; and yet may evade the whole design of Christianity, by a false system of interpretation. For as in the dark ages an excessive superstition bowed to the mere authority of the church; so, in the present day, a bold and hazardous licentiousness may throw all the peculiar doctrines of the Bible into doubt and uncertainty. We have now the corruptions of eighteen hundred years flowing together. We have a secret infidelity, under the name of Christianity. It is important, therefore, to consider what clue we may find in the principles laid down in our former Lectures, to guide us on our way.

Now, the observations already offered on the nature, reasonableness, and extent of faith, imply all, and more than all, that we can require. Indeed, we might throw ourselves back upon the Lectures on Inspiration,¹ where we found that every thing was simple, human, ordinary, as to the manner in which the sacred writers conveyed to us those instructions which were inspired and superintended by the Divine Spirit. But the class of young persons, whom I have especially in my eye in these discourses, require details.

Let us, therefore, consider the right method of interpreting Scripture, as **SPRINGING DIRECTLY FROM A TRUE FAITH; AS AIDED BY COMMON SENSE AND THE ORDINARY LAWS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE; and AS SUGGESTED AND AMPLIFIED BY THE PARTICULAR CHARACTER OF AN INSPIRED BOOK.**

I. Let us consider how a right method of interpreting Scripture SPRINGS DIRECTLY FROM A TRUE FAITH.

1. For such a faith implies an **HONEST APPLICATION OF OUR NATURAL UNDERSTANDING** to the sacred Scriptures as a revelation from Almighty God. The key to all sound interpretation, is a due reverence for the divine writings, in opposition to levity, to human fancies, to a scornful spirit, to attempts to force a meaning on the holy word. The very essence of faith is submission to the testimony of God. Reason closes her reign, as to the matter before her, when she opens the book of God; and faith ascends the throne—leaving to reason her proper province, the subordinate ministration of arranging and expounding the new and majestic truths thus brought before her.

Faith in Christianity is nothing more nor less than faith in the things of which Christianity consists—faith in the matter of Revelation—that is, in the real

¹ Lecture XII. and XIII.

and honest meaning of the words and sentences, conveying these matters to reasonable and accountable beings. This speaks for itself. Is faith merely a pretence, which allows, generally, a submission to divine Revelation, and then rejects, by piece-meal, the particulars of which that Revelation consists? Is that faith? Or, is it faith to pretend plausibly to receive the Bible as the unerring word of God, and then to bring our own opinions, our own notions, our own prejudices, and impose them on that word? Is it faith to profess an unreserved obedience to the statute law of heaven, promulgated by the great Sovereign of the universe—and then to cavil, to elude the plain sense, to alter all the provisions of that statute law? What! is natural religion to be the limit of our faith in revealed, and all beyond to be explained away or excised? No. A true belief involves, in its very first exercise, an honest application of our natural understanding to the matters of the divine Record, as resting on the testimony of Almighty God.

2. Faith includes, in the next place, a THOROUGH WILLINGNESS TO SUBMIT OUR UNDERSTANDING AND HEART TO ALL THE TRUTHS WHICH GOD IS PLEASED TO REVEAL. In fact, without an unprejudiced, and docile temper of mind, no book on morals or religion can teach; much less can the Bible. False interpretations spring from man's perverse resistance to the matter which a simple and obvious rendering would bring out. Now, this is intolerable. The least true and lively faith will produce something of that humility before the infinite Creator, that sense of ignorance, that conviction of the immeasurable distance between God and man, which bow the whole soul before the discoveries of Revelation. A natural interpretation of the Bible follows, of course. The student comes to it to be taught; he sits as a scholar to receive instruction; he presents his understanding and heart as a plain, unwritten tablet for the divine

Author of Revelation to inscribe therein whatsoever he pleases. This is the very essence of faith.

In fact, the whole of our present subject is merely the working out of the particular habit of mind of which faith consists, and to which it leads. "The Bible," says Thomas à Kempis, "must be read in the same spirit in which it was written." This temper will not, indeed, enlarge the powers of the understanding or discernment beyond the reach of man. Mysteries will be mysteries still; but it will give a sincere and unreserved desire to know God's will, to receive from Scripture, and not to bring to it, the truths of religion; and to interpret the divine word according to its own principles and discoveries, and the analogy of its doctrines; and not according to preconceived opinions, natural religion, the reasonings of men, the notions of the world, the prejudices of a sect, the prescriptions of a church, or the standard of theology which may happen to prevail in any particular place or time.

3. Again, faith PUTS US IN POSSESSION OF MANY OF THE BLESSINGS of which the Scriptures treat, and gives us a just apprehension of the great subject of divine Revelation. Even a work of human literature and science, can only be understood by those who know something of the general matter treated of. He who loves the science, and enters into it, will be the best interpreter; will take the greatest pains; will have the largest share of self-distrust, when difficulties arise; will take things in their order, and apply them for the opening of his way to further advances. Whereas, a man who knows little of the matter treated of, or who has no delight in it, or is possessed with an hypothesis contrary to its first principles, will make out very little to purpose.

Thus in the Bible, interpretation to one who is in possession of the blessings treated of, is in many cases rather intuition than reasoning. Ninety-nine things

out of a hundred, which puzzle the merely learned theologian, are to him obvious and clear. In reading, for instance, the epistles of St. Paul, if he has obtained the chief blessings there delineated, and is in the practice of the duties enjoined; if he has felt the discoveries made of man's fallen and sinful state; if, by the particular application of the principle of faith, he has reposed a humble trust in the propitiation of the Son of God, and has received the blessing of a free justification; if he has been led to love God by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and is delighting to walk in his commandments—if he has all these things, of course he has a key to the interpretation of most of the language relating to them.

But if in studying these epistles, a man sets out with a high opinion of his own understanding and his own merits; if he has no perception of his fallen and guilty state; if he has no view of his need of a Saviour, no reliance upon his sacrifice, no love to him, no desire to obey him;—what can he make out of the language of St. Paul? What will he do as an interpreter? He will, he must perplex himself and others: he will use terms without meaning; he will bring down the divine doctrine to his standard; he will put things out of their place; he will be inconsistent and obscure, and perhaps contradictory, in his expositions: he will be a far worse interpreter than the simplest Christian that has true faith to perceive the scope and tendency of the matters treated of. The simple Christian may sometimes be formally wrong, he may mistake a particular argument, he may push a point beyond its bearing; but he will be substantially right. No man thoroughly understands a practical subject, except he has experienced it so far, as to be able to compare what he reads or hears with what he finds in himself or knows to be found in others. The possession of the things treated of is the best clue. Other men make truth, this man obeys it.

4. Then faith leads us to SEEK THE ASSISTANCE OF GOD'S BLESSED SPIRIT in rightly understanding the Scriptures. It is by this aid we attain that actual experience of many of its blessings which we have just been adverting to. The Christian finds the Bible to be a Revelation, with an accompanying promise of the Holy Ghost, to dissipate that mental darkness which the same Revelation declares to be the effect of the fall. He implores, therefore, the grace of God, the illuminating power, the aid which removes prejudices, which shows the force and harmony of doctrine, which opens the meaning, and demonstrates the necessity, and points out the adaptation, and gives the beauty of truth. Thus he calls to mind the Saviour's last act when he discoursed with his disciples, over whose minds the notions of a temporal Messiah had thrown a cloud, and whose very love to their master, being ill-directed, interfered with their just conceptions of his kingdom ; he remembers that our Lord "opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures ;" he remembers that the apostle prayed for the Ephesians, that they might have "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened." And thus he unites prayer for these blessings with every effort of his judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures ; he leans not to human wisdom, but seeks of God divine teaching and grace.

5. Faith also guards us against THE DANGER OF HAZARDOUS INTERPRETATIONS, OR A FALSE USE OF DIFFICULT PASSAGES.

The will of man is deeply concerned in all departures from the truth.² No fundamental principle rests upon one or two difficult texts. If there be that singleness of heart which is involved in a lively faith, no

² Luke xxiv. 45. Eph. i. 17, 18.

³ Bishop Van Mildert, to whom this lecture is much indebted.

danger will arise from the misunderstanding of such passages—and they are but few. The peril arises, not from the existence of such passages in Scripture, but from the “wresting them, when we are unstable and unlearned, to our own destruction.”[†] Whereas, if faith meets these texts, she either wholly leaves them, or else uses them to the purposes for which the entire Revelation of Christ was communicated. “The perverse disputings” which the apostle guards us against, are “of men of corrupt minds.”[‡] Men of humble minds, endued with true faith, fall not into perverse disputings; if controversies arise, they will not be perverse, they will not be of men who corrupt the word of God, they will not be of men who handle the word of God deceitfully. Thus faith shapes her course safely amidst the shoals and quicksands, where human presumption would make shipwreck.

6. Finally, the same principle of submission to God’s testimony will dispose us to resort to all necessary helps, according to the nature of the different cases which arise. A possession of the main blessings of Christianity and reliance on the assistance of the Holy Spirit, will guard the Christian against material error; but will not exempt him from the necessity of various subordinate helps for attaining a more adequate knowledge of truth in all its bearings and proportions. Divine Revelation is indeed perfectly distinct from human science, as emanating from the fountain of wisdom; yet it has this in common with ordinary science, that it flows through the channel of human instruction. We must receive it “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God;”[§] but we must nevertheless examine it as it is delivered, clothed in the language of men, and subject to the general rules of composition. This is the pro-

† 2 Peter iii. 16.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 5.

§ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

vince of human learning ; the matter being still unreservedly submitted to, as coming from God himself, and infinitely superior to the mere petty arts of human criticism. Superstition blinds the eyes of men, forbids them to study the Scriptures, and enjoins an implicit obedience to the traditions of the church. Enthusiasm rejects all human aid, and professes to rely exclusively on the illuminating Spirit. A well-informed faith avoids each extreme. It relies simply on the divine aid for the matter of truth ; but for the form she consults all those helps which a good providence places within her reach ; the labours of commentators ; the writings of the fathers ; the confessions of particular churches ; the general consent of the universal church in all ages and places ; the aids of travellers, historians, and naturalists ; all the lights cast on the study of the original languages, and the kindred dialects ; the continual elucidations of living students ; together with the deductions of reason as to the relative bearing of the things laid before us. Only these aids will be consulted not as primary, but subordinate ; not as masters and lords over faith, but servants and ministers to her ; not as permitted to meddle with the matters revealed, but in order to arrive at the fact, what really are the matters revealed.

In these various respects, then, a just exposition of the meaning of Scripture springs directly from faith, because the true and living faith which receives divine Revelation, receives the particulars of which that Revelation consists.

But whilst a right interpretation has this source, it will be materially aided by,

II. COMMON SENSE AND THE ORDINARY LAWS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE.

Faith having laid the foundation of a just understanding of Scripture, hands us over to the general dictates of conscience, and the rules by which lan-

guage is ordinarily interpreted. To teach by human language, is to teach by ideas which already form a part of the stock of human knowledge. If terms are used in a new sense, they will be found to be explained by the sacred writers. If divine grace is necessary to the reception of spiritual things, this also will, as we have frequently observed, be fairly avowed in the Revelation itself. But the language will, after all, be human, and be subject to the usual laws by which ideas are conceived and expressed. There is, indeed, a poverty in all language; and translations, and distance of time and place, may throw an ambiguity over certain passages of ancient authors; yet, in point of fact, there is only one true sense to be attached to any word, in any writer, ancient or modern; which sense is indicated by the connexion and series of the discourse, by its subject-matter, by the design of the speaker or writer, or by some other adjuncts.

In common life, no prudent and conscientious man intends that a diversity of meanings should be assigned to what he writes or says. And if books are handed down to us, as of authority and credit, it is because they were composed with integrity of purpose. Now, if this be the practice in all fair and upright intercourse between man and man, much more is it so in the Book of God. The perspicuity of Scripture, the plainness and simplicity of the style, the artless form of the narrative parts, its brief and diversified hymns and psalms, the gospels and epistles penned by the Evangelists and Apostles, for popular instruction; the manner in which truth is generally conveyed, surrounded with practical uses, and as occasions served to develop it—all this assures us that the ordinary common-sense laws of human language, are our safe guide in the interpretation of the sacred Records. The design of God in his Revelation would be lost to his creatures, if an endless multiplicity of senses were once admitted.

Some chief rules, however, may be laid down, which are nothing but the application of these principles: but which still may be of use in a day like the present, when novelties of all kinds are afloat, and the very grounds of an honest interpretation are disputed.

1. **THE SIMPLEST SENSE IS GENERALLY THE TRUE ONE.** The Bible is the most popular book in the world. "Where the simple and obvious sense will stand," says the judicious Hooker, "he that departs from it, goes farthest from the real mind of the Spirit." The methods of obtaining this sense are not arbitrary, any more than in any other book; but fixed by laws drawn by experience and observation from the nature of language. All important truth lies on the surface of the Scriptures, recurs again and again, is stated in a variety of forms, and presented in many different lights. No man can mistake it, so far as the comprehension of it depends on the terms employed. It is not interpretation, but faith which is wanting. It is the passions of men, not the difficulties of Scripture, which corrupt our decisions. The vast bulk of mankind are quite as capable of understanding all its main statements, as the learned few, though these can combine truth better into a system, and defend it more successfully against the arts of sophists. This one rule embraces nine hundred and ninety-nine parts out of a thousand of the doctrinal and preceptive parts of the Bible.

2. If the sense of certain passages be not obvious, then consult more at length **THE OCCASION OF THE BOOK BEING WRITTEN**, the time when it was published, the persons to whom it was addressed, the context by which it is surrounded. This is what an honest man does as to any human writing. Generally the sense is simple, and he follows it. If difficulties occur, he pauses, he reads the passage again, he looks to the preceding and following sentences, he considers the occasion, the persons, the time, the general sub-

ject of the writing. Thus he soon obtains the true meaning, or a meaning not very remote from the true one. For no material false sense can be put upon a particular expression, but some other expressions in the sentence, some other parts of the narrative or argument will detect it. The false meaning may suit some few of the surrounding terms, but not all; and, like a key to a lock, unless it be the true one, it will only be the more difficult to pass, as force and violence are applied. Matters of history, names, chronological dates, geographical niceties, genealogies, lie generally the most open to uncertainty; and it is of little comparative moment to determine these things over accurately, so far as the practical influence of Christianity is concerned. Other passages are illustrated by the usages of the time, by the observations of travellers in the east, by the established force of proverbial language, by the comparison of parallel phrases. Here a cautious criticism has her natural province, and no limit can be assigned to the just improvements and discoveries which every age brings. All this is the dictate of common sense. Another rule follows.

3. **LET BRIEF PASSAGES BE EXPLAINED BY THOSE THAT ARE MORE FULL ON THE SAME OR KINDRED SUBJECTS.** The collation of parallel texts is the master-key to the holy Scriptures. It makes the Bible its own interpreter. It surrounds the short summaries of truth with a divine exposition. It gives the pregnant word its real, because inspired, meaning. I read of the Almighty being a rock, a refuge, a hiding-place; I read of Christ being the shepherd of his people; I read of the preaching of the cross; I read of the Comforter of the church. I want to know the import of these or the like brief phrases. I turn to what the same sacred writers have themselves said more at length on the same topics. This is my clue. I throw into the single term all the ideas conveyed in the enlarged instruction. Thus the mysteries of the being and per-

fections of the eternal God, of the incarnation, of the sacrifice of the cross, the fall of man, the operations of grace, are all expounded for me by the presiding Spirit. The prophecies of the Old Testament, again, are thus made to illustrate the transactions of the New; and the history of the New to reflect light upon the Old. The phraseology of the Mosaic economy is thus traced out in the language of the Evangelical, and is interpreted according to that more spiritual dispensation. The historical parts of Scripture are also blended in one body with the preceptive; and the prophets' allusions to passing events are illustrated by the reigns of the kings under whom they flourished.

There is nothing which is necessary for man to know, but, if it is expressed concisely and briefly in one part of Scripture, is given more fully and explicitly in another. It is the same inspiring Spirit that speaks every where, and it is our duty to follow his infallible guidance.

"I will not scruple to assert," says Bishop Horsley, "that the most illiterate Christian, if he can but read his English Bible and will take the pains to read it in this manner," (comparing the parallel passages according to the references,) "will not only obtain all that practical knowledge which is necessary to salvation, but by God's blessing will become learned in every thing relating to religion, in such a degree, that he will not be liable to be moved, either by the refined arguments, or by the false assertions of those who endeavour to graft their own opinions upon the oracles of God. Let him study the Bible in the manner which I recommend, and let him never cease to pray for the illumination of that Spirit by which these books were dictated, and the whole compass of abstruse philosophy and recondite history shall furnish no arguments with which the perverse will of man shall be able to shake this learned Christian's faith."

4. Let FIGURATIVE AND POETICAL PARTS BE IN-

TERPRETED BY THE FIXED AND ORDINARY LAWS WHICH ARE CONSTANTLY APPLIED TO SUCH LANGUAGE IN COMMON LIFE. Every one knows the difference between an act of Parliament and a poem ; and every honest mind applies the rules of language as they are respectively suitable to each. In grave and straightforward history, in the lives of patriarchs and saints, in the narratives of our Saviour's actions, in the delivery of solemn doctrine and precept in the epistles, the obvious sense of words is the true one. In the lofty poems of Moses, of Isaiah, of David ; in the allegories and parables of our Lord ; in the Proverbs of Solomon ; in the poetical imagery of the Canticles and the Book of Job ; in other parts of Scripture where the style is figurative, highly sublime, richly adorned with metaphors, abounding with sudden transitions ; filled with those kinds of expression which an impassioned feeling or the prophetic impulse dictates—the interpretation is subject to different rules, but rules as strict as in the plainest and most unadorned prose. Every man feels this, and insensibly obeys the leading of common sense in interpreting the language of the Scriptures. The danger arises when weak or ill-informed persons take occasion to impose wild and fanciful senses, merely because certain terms, independently considered, might admit of them, though in their connexion they reject the violence. And still greater evil springs from the application of typical or poetical rules of interpretation to the preceptive parts of Scripture, and thus explaining away all the force of the most solemn truths under the pretence of eastern imagery or Mosaical types. Common sense distinguishes. Common sense, as the handmaid to faith, passes on securely. It is the perverse and wilful, or the weak and inconsiderate, who are led astray. No man can wander far, that desires to seek truth, and uses the proper means for attaining it. The parables have commonly a key given by our Lord. The loftiest flights of the prophets have

some main import. The most profound observations on human life, in the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, have a clear and declared practical purpose. The devotional poems are the genuine language of the soul under deep emotions; and are instantly understood when similar emotions are felt. The few difficulties that remain are not generally so circumstanced, as to embarrass the humble student. The unfulfilled prophecies, indeed, where the highest poetical and figurative language is connected with the obscurity which the wisdom of God has spread over this part of his word, to be only explained by event, call for more than usual caution in what we venture to interpret; but involve no practical difficulty, if faith and humility be duly regarded.

5. It is a good rule, further, to SUSPEND OUR JUDGMENT WHERE A PASSAGE IS, AFTER ALL, NOT OBVIOUS, AND TO WAIT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, rather than to commit ourselves rashly and prematurely to a decision which may turn out to be unsound. Work with the plain texts, imbibe the simple and main instructions, fully enter into the large and ample materials, where nothing is wanting but time, prayer, meditation, love. Suspend your judgment on the difficult passages. They are left as trials of your humility. The difficulties are attached, perhaps, fully as much to the matter as the expressions. Do not stop all future improvement by wedding yourself to an hypothesis, and then coaxing texts, as it were, to speak your meaning. The Bible is a depth which we shall never fathom in all its parts. Like the book of nature, it is clear in its most important features, and speaks the divine power and goodness; but, like that book, it is mysterious as to the essences of things and their mode of existence, and involves a thousand mysteries beyond our short-sighted view. But like that book, again, it lies open to the cautious labours of future inquirers. Some lights have been thrown upon it by

every diligent and humble student. Every age leaves the difficulties lessened. We transmit to others those which we cannot surmount, as the preceding ages left us many which we have been enabled to elucidate. The same impress of majesty and yet simplicity, of clearness and yet mysteriousness, of main and great features, prominent and intelligible, and deep obscurities in the detail, appear in the book of nature and the book of Christianity.

6. I observe, therefore, lastly, that **THE GREAT SCOPE AND ANALOGY OF TRUTH** will either solve all material difficulties, or render them, in a practical view, so useful, as to produce perhaps better effects than if they were all explicitly solved. The main scope of the Bible is not civil history, poetry, philosophy, human science, critical niceties, beauties of style, artificial systems of theology; but the salvation of the soul of man, by faith in Christ Jesus.⁷ Every part of the Revelation tends to humble and abase the sinner, to honour and exalt the Saviour, and to promote holiness. A distinct conception of this main scope, will assist in forming a judgment as to the drift of passages where minor difficulties occur.

And there are many compendious and brilliant summaries of doctrine, which shine like the polar star, to direct and guide our course. In human compositions the spirit of a book is allowed to be every thing. "I know," says the reader, "the author's mind; I see his scope; I perceive his main points. There are some things which I cannot so well understand; but I sink them in the mass of those which I do." Now if this is true as to human writings, how much more is it applicable to a book which is divinely-inspired

⁷ "The scope or purpose of the Spirit of God is not to express matters of nature in the Scriptures, otherwise than in passage, and for application to man's capacity, and to matters moral and divine. And it is a true rule, 'Auctoris aliud agentis parva auctoritas.'"—*Lord Bacon*.

for one simple purpose, to guide me from earth to heaven, to reveal my fall and recovery, to teach me my duty and my happiness, to discover to me myself and my Saviour!

But this leads us to consider how all the preceding remarks should be amplified by—

III. THE RULES WHICH THE PARTICULAR CHARACTER OF THE INSPIRATION BELONGING TO THE BIBLE, SUGGESTS.

For there are various ways in which corrupt nature is likely to fail in the application of the general rules directly springing from faith, as well as from the particular details of them suggested by common sense and the ordinary laws of language. These dangers may probably lie on the side of drawing down the whole import of Revelation to a human level; forgetting the weight which the last and finishing portion of Revelation may claim; explaining away capital doctrines and duties among the temporary and local topics of different dispensations; weakening the grand distinction between what is real and vital, and what is only nominal in Christianity; omitting to take in the place and use and proportion and effects of each truth, with the truth itself; forcing the simple meaning of Scripture either to express or exclude mysteries according to our own turn of mind; and attempting too much to reduce into system what perhaps God has never intended we should be able to effect.

Now to guard against these evils, which spring from our fallen nature, let us ever keep in mind the peculiar character of inspiration which the Bible possesses. And, therefore, let the matter of Revelation suggest, in these respects, our rules of interpretation.

1. Let us RISE TO THE SUBLIMITY OF THE SCRIPTURAL MYSTERIES, and not bring down these mysteries to our petty conceptions. The things of Scripture are new, grand, stupendous, inconceivable.

When we first discover them in the holy Scriptures by a true faith, we are lost in the contemplation of the greatness of the ever-blessed God, in the majesty of his works, in the orders of his providence, in the incarnation of his only-begotten Son, in the sacrifice of redemption, in the operations of the Holy Spirit. But when we afterwards become involved in the human rules of interpretation, we are in danger of sinking in our estimate of truth. "We are to use reason in religion every where," says my Lord Bacon, "only the mind must be enlarged to the greatness of the mystery, and not the mystery contracted to the narrowness of the mind." The words of Scripture are plain, the language generally perspicuous; we think we seize the interpretation because no difficulties occur. But we must continually rise to the elevation, the vastness, the glory of the divine theme. We must not insensibly lower the Revelation, but aim at enlightening and expanding our minds to the amplitude of the discoveries. We must conceive of them according to their transcendent grandeur, and long for the future world to unfold them to us more adequately. This is to act indeed as faith demands. This is to act as we, worms of the earth, are called to do in studying a Revelation from the eternal and infinite God.

2. We must give to the LAST AND FINISHING PORTION OF REVELATION THAT WEIGHT WHICH IT MAY JUSTLY CLAIM. For as it has pleased God to make the discoveries of his grace gradual, from the first dawn of promise to the full effulgence of the gospel day, we must follow the augmenting light, and expound all the preceding instructions in the tone and glory of the consummating development. This is more important, as our Lord expressly promised the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into the fulness of that truth which they were not able to bear, and which he did not discover, during his abode upon earth. Not that we are to undervalue the preceding portions

of the sacred records, or to omit giving a proportionate importance to all its instructions; but we are to bestow the largest share of attention on the evangelical economy, and more especially on the apostolical epistles, because they contain the last and most explicit declarations of the divine will. To confine our regards to the Psalms, the Sermon on the mount, the Gospels, is not faith but self-will. To stop at the standard of the Mosaic or prophetic discoveries, is to depreciate the apostolical. To linger about the foot of the mountain of inspiration, instead of ascending to its summit and taking the commanding views and the widened prospects which there stretch around, is neither honourable to God nor advantageous to the interest of truth. It is to lose ALL. It is to sink down to natural reason and a darker dispensation and preparatory truth, when God calls us to the accomplishing and perfect revelation of his will. Our rules, therefore, of interpretation will be misapplied, or rather will be insufficient, if we bring down the gospel dispensation to the previous imperfect and introductory ones, instead of elevating all the preceding portions of the Bible by that which closes and illustrates the whole. And human nature so strongly tends to deterioration, to low views of truth, to self-reliance, that the stronger guard is necessary in our study of the Scriptures, to watch the divine tract, and rise with the rising light of inspiration.

3. It follows that we must not ALLOW WHAT IS TEMPORARY, LOCAL, AND EXTRAORDINARY, TO HIDE THE LUSTRE OF WHAT IS PERMANENT AND BINDING. For the Bible was not written for one age merely, or one country, or one portion of the church; but for all times, all places, all circumstances. The Bible is not merely the inheritance of Europe in the eighteenth century, but was the guide of Asia and Africa in many preceding ages; and is to be the teacher of the whole world in some future time. The

Bible contains the Patriarchal and Mosaical covenants, which have passed away; as well as the evangelical, which remains. The Bible gives the temporary events of the first establishment of the gospel, and the extraordinary powers exercised by Moses and the prophets, and by Christ and his apostles; as well as the permanent and ordinary doctrines and promises which are to illuminate and sustain the church in all times.

There is, therefore, an obvious distinction to be made between temporary, local, and extraordinary matters, and those which are of undeviating and paramount obligation. Human nature loves ceremonies, pomp, external appearance. Human nature soon forgets the infinite grace and power of the Christian redemption, and loses herself amidst the figures and adumbrations of the law, the enactments of the Jewish polity, the directions and rules laid down for the early churches. Human nature is especially in danger of merging the sanctifying and permanent influence of the Holy Ghost, in the temporary and extraordinary power of miraculous operations. The interpreter of Scripture must modify and elevate his views by this important consideration. Much, no doubt, is local and peculiar in the Bible, which, under the Christian dispensation, is either not binding at all, or not binding to the extent that it was under the law. The prophets have much local matter. The divine mission of our Lord has much peculiar to his office. The extraordinary powers of the apostles, and the wonderful gifts of the Spirit, which ceased after the days of the first Christians, make a considerable difference in the mode of the doctrines delivered, in the confirmation of religion, and in the evidences of grace and faith.

Yet, in the midst of all this, there is a grand, exalted, permanent doctrine, an explication of the divine will designed for all times: manifestations of God's purposes of salvation in Christ Jesus, which remain

ever the same ; operations of grace on the fallen heart of man and rules of duty for his conduct, which are similar in every age. Faith, then, must keep her eye on this capital distinction, and acquire the habit of separating, without injuring or weakening, the divine instructions.

4. It is only an extension of the same remark to say, that we must **DISTINGUISH BETWEEN REAL AND VITAL CHRISTIANITY, AND WHAT CONSTITUTES A MERELY NOMINAL ADHERENCE TO ITS EXTERNAL ORDINANCES.** For here, again, nature is ever prone to fail. “ To have the form of godliness, and yet deny the power thereof”¹ is the common disease of the visible church, and will drag down all our interpretations, unless the matter of Revelation, as contained in an inspired volume, and having a character peculiar to itself, elevate and sustain our minds. When once we have imbibed, by a lively faith in God’s testimony, what real Christianity is, what is the scriptural standard of sin and holiness, what is meant by a contrite heart, by pardon and justification and peace in the blood of Christ, by a life of holy love and obedience and communion by the power of the Holy Spirit, by a separation in taste and pursuit from the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. When all this is understood ; and when the opposite points of the utter insufficiency of mere knowledge, of a mere adherence to the name of Christian, a mere discharge of outward duties, a mere participation in sacraments, a mere historical faith and dead works are also perceived and appreciated, then we must be governed by the mighty discovery. We must not waste our time, nor fritter down our attention, upon externals and forms, and the tithing of mint and anise and cummin, whilst we insensibly lose sight of the weightier matters of the law and gospel. We must be aware of the

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 5.

strong propensity of nature to lower the importance and explain away the injunctions of Revelation in its peculiar characters.

We must, therefore, not apply the language addressed to the first churches, where all, or nearly all, were true converts, to churches where scarcely any are. We must not argue from the purity of Christian bodies when few and scattered, and under persecutions, and separated from the civil authority ; to Christian bodies when numerous, and combined in nations, and enjoying external peace, and sustained by Christian governments. The nature of the case must modify the application of our principles. We must keep in mind the broad distinction between spiritual life and spiritual death ; between vigorous and primitive Christianity, and feeble and worldly ; between the church when persecuted and discharged of mere formalists, and the church when at peace and filled with them ; between what constitutes real and vital Christianity, and what is only nominal and external.

5. We must also ever bear in mind, that THE USE AND PLACE AND RELATIVE BEARINGS OF EVERY TRUTH, ARE TO BE DERIVED FROM THE SCRIPTURES, AS WELL AS THE TRUTH ITSELF. This remark differs from the preceding ones. Those went rather to guard the interpreter who was in danger on the side of tameness and worldly-mindedness—this and one or two following ones, are more designed for those whose perils spring from the common corruption of our nature, but in an opposite direction. The peculiar inspiration of the Bible not only excludes cold and heartless interpretation, but excessive and rash. The place and consequences and use of each truth, are to be attended to, as well as the truth itself. We are apt to take the truths of Scripture ; and, having formed them into a series of propositions, to think ourselves at liberty to use them as we will, expound them as we will, put them together into a compact

whole as we will, draw inferences from them as we will. But this is not the Bible. This is not to interpret but to enact the law. This is not to give God's inspired word its proper province, but to contract its limits according to our own imagination.

Humble faith, indeed, aided by the suggestions which common sense furnishes, will guard against fundamental errors in these respects; but the divisions and controversies and heresies which have taken their rise from a neglect of this obvious rule, make it important to dwell somewhat fully upon it.

Our duty in interpreting an inspired Book, is to consider, not only the statements of it in their broadest features, but in all their ramifications. We take the fall and corruption of man—but this is not enough—we must examine the way in which the doctrine is stated, the uses to which it is applied, and the accompanying truths which are found to surround it. We take the purposes and decrees of Almighty God—we deduce the doctrine—but this is not enough, unless we conjoin the proportionate space it fills, the connexion in which it stands, the churches or individuals to which it is addressed, the practical temper and feeling enforced by it. So as to all the doctrines of Scripture. The place, the bearing, the use, the proportion, are as much matters of Revelation, and are as much to be followed out in their details, as the doctrines themselves; or else the foundation will be of God, but the superstructure of man; the premises infallible, but the conclusions fallible; the materials of supernatural temper, the building of natural.

The wheels in a complicated and delicate machine, if taken separately and dissevered from their accompanying parts, lose all their value. View them together, working the one in this way, and the other in that; some moving vertically, others horizontally—the cogs on the circle of one playing into the indented surface of another, and all regulated by the skill of

the mechanic—and the result is beautiful and surprising.

But if I take a single wheel of a watch, as men take a single doctrine of Revelation. If I assert that the wheel is really a part, a constituent part of the curious machine; as men affirm that the doctrine, Predestination for example, is a real and constituent part of the infinite scheme of redemption—what avails such an insulated affirmation? I ask, where are the other wheels, where the combination fixed by the presiding hand of the maker, where the main spring, where the practical result in the indication of the hour of the day and the regulation of human affairs—as I ask where are the doctrines which surround the one in question; where is the combination of truth fixed by the inspiring Spirit, where are the main principles, where is the practical indication of my feelings and duty? The whole Bible—the whole doctrine as stated in the Bible—the whole bearing and influence of the doctrine—the whole relative position of it as to other doctrines—all the inference and deductions from it, must be sought for in the same divine records where the principle itself is revealed, in order to entitle our statements to the high commendation of being scriptural and authoritative.

But we pass on to observe,

6. That we must not FORCE THE SIMPLE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE, EITHER TO EXPRESS OR EXCLUDE MYSTERIES according to our turn of mind. Man is fond of extremes. But all the parts of Scripture are to be received. They are all of equal authority, though not all of equal importance. They all proceed from infinite wisdom; and that wisdom fixes their respective importance, as well as makes them a part of the Revelation. In a state of incipient faith, men are apt to pass over all the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which they do not strongly feel the need of, or do not know how to apply. In a state of warm Christian

feeling and advanced familiarity with truth, men are apt in some degree, perhaps, to omit and pass by the doctrines which rest on natural religion, and the primary duties which immediately flow from conscience and the accountableness of man. They consider them as not only subordinate—which they are—but useless, which they are not. All Revelation takes for granted the religion of nature, and cannot be understood nor applied without that religion being admitted either explicitly or implicitly. It is generally admitted implicitly, conscience is followed, reason is taken as a minister, the responsible nature of man is acted upon without controversy, and without direct reflection. But it is important to remember, that Scripture is not to be forced either to express or exclude mysteries. All the truths in Scripture are of equal authority. The subordinate are to be received so as not to exclude the highest ; and the highest so as not to omit the subordinate. No one truth is to be so interpreted or so employed, as to contradict any other truth.

It is especially necessary, in the present day, to remember that we are not to search for the highest mysteries of Scripture, where they were never intended to be found, but to be content with the different matters of the divine Revelation as they are simply set before us. Some of the most fatal errors in the church have arisen from a desire to find the loftiest discoveries of Revelation concerning Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, in the Patriarchal history, and in the plainest parts of the Books of Kings. The mischiefs arising from Origen's fanciful scheme of old ; the errors of Cocceius, in modern times ; the forcible application of every part and portion of the Psalms to the Messiah, and the eagerness to find out what is called a spiritual sense, in opposition to the literal meaning of God's word, have all their origin in a discontent with the proportion in which the mysteries of Scripture are found in that divine book. and in the wild notion of

imposing unheard of, and new and remote and unnatural senses upon the plainest narratives or most devotional parts of the divine Records. The effect is to take away all meaning from the whole Bible, to open the door for every extravagance, and to destroy that fine and beautiful variety which now characterises the inspired book of God.

The Holy Spirit has in every part of Scripture, one grand meaning, and conveys one leading instruction, though others may by fair inference be deduced. This is the real spiritual meaning, that is, the meaning of a book which relates to spiritual things, and comes down from God to man. But some call the spiritual meaning a new meaning put on Scripture by a lively fancy. Types, prophecies, parables have, of course, a meaning beyond that which they express. But in all these, judgment is the interpreter, according to the established rules of language. Those parts of Scripture which are not of this character, have only one meaning, and that is the literal; and our concern is not to hunt for a new meaning which we call the spiritual, but to deduce useful instruction from the plain sense of the passage. Otherwise we may make the Scriptures mean what we please; we may impose a sense of our own; and there will remain no certainty in Revelation, but we may prove from it error as readily as truth. The Papist, the Arian, the Socinian, the Neologian, applaud the suggestion, and employ it but too successfully to their own purposes. And the piety and good intentions of some who first propose such senses, do not lessen the mischief of the scheme on which they proceed, but render it more plausible and dangerous.¹

7. But I observe, lastly, that the peculiar character of Inspiration belonging to the Bible should prevent our attempting TO REDUCE TRUTH TO A TOO MI-

¹ Scott.

NUTE HUMAN SYSTEM, WHICH PERHAPS GOD HAS NEVER INTENDED WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO. Some plan of truth, in its great outlines, is, indeed, essential—the apostles continually give such schemes. The deduction of consequences is also necessary, for the purposes of discipline and good order in Christian churches. Confessions and articles of faith have therefore their use. But to frame a detailed and minute system of truth in the way of what is termed systematic Theology, is to forget the majesty and simplicity of truth, to forget the limits of the human understanding, to forget all we have remarked so frequently on the ignorance of man, to forget the author and infinite perfections of the inspired Volume. The premises are not all revealed. We know in part only. The mind of the interpreter is soon biassed in the exposition of particular passages, when the trammels of a system hang around him. The frankness and simplicity of truth is lost. Many of the most important addresses to the consciences of sinners are weakened, and much of the cautionary instruction designed for true Christians is omitted. Our system becomes our Bible. We start from its propositions as our first principles, and the authority of the all-perfect word is virtually undermined.¹ Faith itself is contracted and enfeebled.

¹ “For the obtaining of the information, it resteth upon the true and sound interpretation of the Scriptures, which are the fountains of the waters of life. The interpretations of Scripture are of two sorts: methodical, and solute or at large. For this divine water, which excelleth so much that of Jacob's well, is drawn forth much in the same kind as natural water useth to be out of wells and fountains; either it is forced up into a cistern, and from thence fetched and derived for use; or else it is drawn and received in buckets and vessels immediately where it springeth; the former sort whereof, though it seem to be more ready, yet in my judgment is more subject to corrupt. This is that method which hath exhibited to us the scholastical divinity; whereby divinity has been reduced into an art, as into a cistern, and the streams of doctrine of positions fetched and derived from thence.

“Certainly as those wines which flow from the first treading

Indeed this is the one point which we have been endeavouring to illustrate and to which we return. Our whole subject is involved in a true and lively faith. The direct suggestions and aids it furnishes—the helps which it derives from common sense and sound laws of language, and the considerations arising from the peculiar character of inspiration attached to the divine records, are only so many methods which the principle of faith employs in her exercise on the testimony of God. The more simple and vigorous that principle is, the more will it apply itself to the devout study of the Scriptures in all their extent, in all their variety of matter, in all their authority upon the conscience. In short, the reception of the Christian religion, as of divine origin, will carry with it all the details of that Revelation, and lead to all the means of ascertaining what it is which they include.

But here an objection meets us. A diversity of interpretation is said to exist among sincere and devout Christians, and to render the tenor of the Scripture so far uncertain, and embarrass the mind of the sincere inquirer.

To this we reply, that the fact itself has been exaggerated—that, whatever these differences are, they are not chargeable upon Christianity—that they fall on subordinate matters for the most part—that they may be avoided in practice—and that the universal church has presented but one front of truth to mankind.

I say THE FACT HAS BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED. There have been divers interpretations

of the grapes, are sweeter and better than those forced out by the press, which gives them the roughness of the husk and the stone ; so are those doctrines best and wholesomest which flow from a gentle crush of the Scriptures, and are not wrung into controversies and common place. And this ourselves we set down as wanting, under the title of, *THE FIRST FLOWINGS OF SCRIPTURE.*—*Lord Bacon.*

no doubt ; but they have been trifling and inconsiderable, compared with the direct and universal truths which Christianity has taught. Misguided men, though pious, have erred and do err ; but let us not lose sight of the ten thousand times ten thousand blessings which these very men receive and act upon. Arianism, Socinianism, and Neologism have indeed, caused great evils by their corruptions of the sacred word ; but this is infidelity under the guise and cloke of Christianity, destroying the faith of Christians. A cold and tame interpretation, also, of the Christian records evaporates all their force ; but this is formality under the name of faith. To all who receive the divine Revelation with a true faith—and with none other are we now concerned—the interpretation of its records is simple, and the diversities of opinion in no way weaken the mighty force of the truths communicated.

BUT THE DIFFERENCES, WHATEVER THEY ARE, ARE NOT CHARGEABLE UPON CHRISTIANITY—just as the unnumbered evils to which the works of God in nature are abused, are not chargeable on natural religion. No : the folly of man is not to be imputed to the infinitely wise God. Man perverts every blessing in some degree. The depravity of his affections, the weakness of his reasoning faculties, the different portion of original endowment and of means of improvement with which he is entrusted, all occasion a variety of judgment on some of the declarations of God's will, both in the book of nature and the book of grace—but none prevent the operation of truth, the obligation of conscience, the main and commanding discoveries of the divine glory which are made. Nay, the very diversities of interpretation on minor details, prove the integrity of the inquirers, the independence of mind with which they have sought truth, and the sincerity of the faith with which they embrace the Christian Revelation.

For these interpretations FALL FOR THE MOST

PART ON SUBORDINATE MATTERS, and merely serve as a wholesome exercise of humility towards God, and forbearance and kindness towards man. What have the diversities of opinion as to the discipline of churches done, but set various bodies of Christians to work with redoubled activity, to prosecute with warmer zeal one great object? And even the differences of interpretation on the fundamental doctrines of revelation, affect not the doctrines themselves, but some circumstances, some particular uses or inferences from them, whilst the capital points remain untouched.

And the remaining evils of these different interpretations may be DIMINISHED AND AVOIDED IN PRACTICE, if the Scriptures be studied with adequate humility; if the main doctrines and duties of Christianity are kept prominently in view; if the heart be faithful to the love of a crucified Saviour. A practical use of the most disputed texts may be readily found, from the design of the sacred penman; whilst the very diversities are calls for further improvement, larger measures of attention and prayer, growing acquaintance by the comparison of different proposals and opinions, with the amplitude and virtue of the word of God.

And, after all, the UNIVERSAL CHURCH HAS PRESENTED BUT ONE FRONT OF TRUTH TO MANKIND. Controversies have been temporary; new and strange interpretations have seldom outlived the age which gave them birth; differences of judgment have been conciliated. In the meantime, the whole body of sincere and devout Christians—those who really receive the Christian Revelation—have presented one unvaried front of commanding truth; they have expounded the Scriptures in one way; they have spoken one language; they have been animated with one love to their God and their fellow-creatures, for God's sake; they have found the book of inspiration, emanating from the fountain of wisdom, respond to the language of

their wants, fulfil the urgency of their desires ; and supply all the direction and joy needful for them on their way to heaven.

The whole objection, in short, is frivolous : it first misunderstands the facts, and then magnifies them ; and then argues falsely from them. No ; there are no differences of interpretation as to main points of the divine records ; and the diversities that do exist on less particulars, are as the dust of the balance, or the moats in the sunbeam, compared with the grand, controlling, divine discoveries of salvation to ruined man.

But we hasten to apply for an instant the whole subject to ourselves. The real question is, What kind of faith is it that we repose in the Holy Scriptures ? OUR INTERPRETATION WILL PARTAKE OF THE NATURE OF THE FAITH FROM WHICH IT SPRINGS.—Every man is an interpreter of Scripture—not in public, perhaps,—but to his own heart, to his children, to his family. And every one interprets according to the moral and religious state of his mind. This divides the readers of the Bible into two grand classes ; those who have a true and living faith, the operation of grace—and those who have only a dead and speculative assent, the produce of mere unassisted nature.

THE VITAL CHRISTIANITY OF THE HEART CAN ALONE interpret aright, because it reads with faith, it reads with genuine submission of soul, it reads with an honest desire to know the will of God, it reads with some experience of the blessings treated of, it reads with prayer for the Holy Spirit. This kind of Christianity can employ aright the various rules of ordinary language, under the guidance of plain sense. This kind of Christianity can be aided by the suggestions we have offered on the peculiar character of inspiration attached to the Christian records. But A MERELY NOMINAL AND SPECULATIVE Christianity

can do nothing as an interpreter of the divine word. It may discuss some incidental matters, arrange historical testimonies, settle a genealogy, argue a various reading ; but what can it make of the infinitely momentous discoveries of Revelation which faith alone can receive and apply ? This Christianity wants not an interpreter, but conversion ; not direction, but life ; not the common aids of literary remark, but the transcendent helps of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT, THEN, IS YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE HOLY BOOK ? Tell me its nature, and I will tell you what your faith is, and what the state of mind in which that faith resides.

But the case is plain. Multitudes of professed Christians read the Bible with a veil upon their hearts. They see, but perceive not ; they read, but understand not ; they hear, but they comprehend not. The defect is not in the object, but the faculty ; not in the book of God, but in the will of man ; not in the smaller errors of interpretation, but in the want of the first elements and materials of religious perception.

Let each one, then, who is conscious that he has never understood his Bible—that it has been as a sealed book—that its mysteries have been a stumbling-block, and its doctrines as foolishness to him—**HUMBLE HIMSELF BEFORE THE THRONE OF MERCY, AND IMPORE THE GRACE OF THE ILLUMINATING SPIRIT** ; let him seek that aid which removes impediments and obstacles from the mind ; which changes the heart ; which abases the soul under a sense of sin, and elevates it with the hope of pardon in Jesus Christ. Then all will be clear. Interpretation will become, as I before observed, rather intuition than reasoning. All the mysteries of salvation will lie open in their practical use to his eager view ; the import and force of every part of Scripture will commend itself to his conscience ; the inward possession of the blessings treated of will correspond with the description of them

as the impression on the softened wax answers to the seal ; and diversities of interpretation will shrink into their true insignificance.

This is the grand distinction. Do we interpret the Bible by grace or by nature ; by mere reason, or by the aid of the Holy Spirit ; by dint of labour and study, or by experience ; by the powers of science and the application of intellect, or the voice of conscience and the feelings of the heart ? Do we rest satisfied with the shell and surface of Christianity, external and incidental matters, a theoretic scheme of doctrine, and the creed of a national church ; or do we penetrate to the life and interior meaning of Christianity, reach its essential discoveries, understand its scheme of salvation, and adhere to it from an inward perception of its unspeakable benefits ?

If, on this all-important question, any doubt remains, let us solve it by SEEKING MORE EARNESTLY AND DECISIVELY FOR THE AIDS OF GRACE ; let us examine our state before God ; let us, by prayer, imbibe and drink in the heavenly influences ; let us never rest satisfied till we know the truth, and the truth has made us free from the chains and degradation of sin and Satan.

And let the sincere student of Scripture, whose faith and love are bringing into his heart all the treasures of the divine word, grow and advance in that HUMILITY AND TENDERNESS OF SPIRIT, which are the best preservatives against the minor evils of different interpretations of Scripture. The real danger from these evils is not from the passages thus expounded in various manners, but from the self-will, the pertinacity, the dogmatism, the spirit of controversy, which the great spiritual adversary may take occasion to infuse. Humility and love preserve our own rights of judgment entire, but avoid the bitter fruits of obstinacy and division. The vital and fundamental points are held in meekness and charity ; the incidental ones in silent

and unobtrusive opinion ; whilst that blessed time is waited for, in which the operations of the intellect and the emotions of the heart shall be for ever harmonized in the revelations of a world, where knowledge and love will be united in their highest exercises, never to be disjoined or clouded through eternity.

LECTURE XXV.

THE UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION WHICH LIES UPON
EVERY HUMAN BEING TO OBEY DIVINE RE-
VELATION.

JOHN iii. 18—21.

He that believeth, is not condemned ; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world ; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.

WE have done with the evidences of Christianity ; we have concluded our argument. We turn now to entreaty, to feeling, to the impression which we desire to leave on every heart ; to the universal obligation under which every one of us lies to receive the Christian Revelation with a true and lively faith ; such a faith as carries with it all the practical ends for which Christianity was designed, and terminates in EVER-
LASTING SALVATION.

Nothing can be a stronger proof of the corruption

of man, than that any topic like this should be necessary. We might have supposed that the question would have been to convince men that they were permitted to share in such vast blessings. We might have supposed that the difficulty would have been to persuade them that the fountain of grace and salvation stood really open to all ; that God invited his fallen creatures to happiness ; that he welcomed a weary, heavy-laden world to truth and rest.

And this is indeed, the question with every penitent and contrite inquirer. The difficulty is then raised, not upon man's part, whether he will receive the blessing or not, but as it regards the offended Majesty of heaven—whether it be indeed permitted to the sinner to approach his footstool, and drink of the fountain of felicity and joy. When the heart is submissive, there is no want of simplicity in appreciating the evidence, no want of eagerness to partake of the benefits ; but much fear and apprehension lest it should lose such unspeakable mercies through unworthiness or unbelief.

But with the great mass of mankind the case is the reverse. Nothing is so difficult as to convince them of the paramount obligations of Christianity. They slight its claims ; they elude its demands of faith and obedience ; they efface from their hearts the deep impressions which truth from time to time infixes.

It becomes, therefore, most important to set distinctly before them the universal obligation under which every human being lies, to submit to the Christian Revelation.

Now, we may argue this, or rather enforce this—for I abstain from further direct argument—by reminding you that men are already bound to obey and love God by the STRONGEST ANTECEDENT OBLIGATIONS ; that Christianity is so excellent in itself, that THE SLIGHTEST EXTERNAL EVIDENCE is sufficient to oblige men to obey it ; that THE SIMPLICITY, VA-

RIETY, INDEPENDENCE, AND FORCE OF THE EVIDENCES with which Christianity is actually surrounded, increase this obligation ; that the duty is augmented by the PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES which we have each respectively ENJOYED ; and that the whole is carried to the utmost height by its VAST DISCOVERIES AND THE IMMENSE INTERESTS WHICH ARE AT STAKE.

And do Thou, O blessed Lord God, vouchsafe to assist us! Do Thou dispose every ear to attend! Do Thou dissipate every prejudice from our understandings, and discharge every passion from our hearts! Do Thou excite in each breast an ardent desire for that grace, which alone can cause truth to penetrate and renew the soul, and give efficacy and success to all those evidences with which thou hast been pleased to accompany thy gospel!

I. We observe, in the first place, that men ARE ALREADY BOUND TO LOVE AND OBEY GOD BY THE STRONGEST ANTECEDENT OBLIGATIONS ; and are therefore by no means at liberty to receive or reject Christianity at their mere option.

The question is not between Christianity, and no moral and religious accountableness whatever ; but between that accountableness, dreary and awful, without assistance and without joy, and the same accountableness relieved by the gracious discoveries of Christianity. We are addressing those who admit the bonds of essential religion. With the atheist we have nothing to do in the present argument. "Do not imagine, then,"—I adopt the language of a great writer,¹—"that you can consult your tranquillity by shaking off the incumbrance of Revelation. Do not imagine you may live without religion, the fear of God, restraining your passions, mortifying your lusts, making sacrifices from a sense of duty, if you

¹ Robert Hull.

can succeed in getting rid of the New Testament. You may shake off the restraints of the Christian religion ; but you will not on that account shake off the restraints of religion. Christianity did not give birth to religion. Christ was not the author of religion—did not come into the world to teach religion. Had the Son of God not come forth from the presence of the Father into the world, religion would have remained in all its extent and obligation. The law of God was already promulgated ; the obligation of man to love and serve God would have remained unaltered—the chain which connects man with the Deity, undissolved. Our blessed Saviour came not to make you religious, but to make you happy by religion. If he had not come, indeed, the religion of nature could only have breathed the accents of despair and misery. Whether you choose to be the disciples of Christ or not, you are previously under his law, and that law you have broken. Let the New Testament be a deception—Jesus Christ an impostor ; yet a judgment to come is certain. Every secret thing will be brought to light. Whether you shall taste, indeed, of the divine goodness, depends upon the truth of the gospel ; whether you entertain any hope of pardon, enjoy communion with God as a Father, experience the consolations of religion, be justified by faith, and die in the full assurance of hope ; this is alone the gift of the religion of Christ. If you reject this, you reject your remedy, your medicine, the only antidote to your misery. Your guilt, apostacy, ruin, is the great foundation on which all the statements concerning a Saviour rest ; the things supposed and taken for granted. Let no man think he can quiet his mind by shaking off the fear of judgment, by rejecting revealed religion. The only consolation you can derive by refusing to be guided by the New Testament, is to lose the hopes of religion ; to stand, in relation to God, as an enemy, when you might have been reconciled to

him by the blood of his Son, adopted into his family, and made heirs of eternal life. Do not imagine that you are in a state of safety, because you go out of hearing of the voice of Christ, the great Deliverer."

Nor is this the only obligation under which we already lie, with respect to God and religion. Another follows. Let it never be forgotten, that if Christianity be true, it is NOT A MATTER LEFT TO OUR OPTION whether we will receive it or not. Human authority cannot constrain ; but divine can and does. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that it is left to our choice whether we will receive Christianity or not, so that we are under no direct moral obligation to believe in it and obey it. On the contrary, we are under the strongest and most indispensable, supposing the religion to be true. Man is not left to his option ; and he knows he is not : his whole moral nature, his conscience, the reason of the case, his common understanding, tells him the obligations he is under to submit to the greatest communication which God ever made to man. What ! when God has provided a scheme for the salvation of mankind before the ages ; when he has proposed that scheme by many successive revelations of himself ; when he has separated a chosen family from the rest of the world, to serve as a repository of his counsels ; when he has sent out many holy men and prophets, to signify beforehand the glories of a new kingdom, which he meant to establish upon earth, and to prepare men for the reception of it ; when, after all these preludes, he has astonished the world with the completion of his adorable counsels, by sending forth his only-begotten Son, the express image of his person, to take upon him our nature, and to suffer and die for us ; and by raising up apostles and evangelists, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to record these amazing transactions, and, by the attestation of stupendous miracles, to spread the knowledge of them over the face of the

earth :—when this, and much more has been done by the Almighty, to usher in the gospel, think not that all this mighty apparatus is to be thrown away on our caprice or obstinacy ; and that, after all, we may be at liberty to reject his whole design, or take as much or as little of it as our wayward fancies should suggest to us. No : as well may we think to overturn the everlasting mountains, or push the earth itself from its centre, as to defeat or set aside one tittle of that eternal purpose which God hath purposed in Christ Jesus. To whomsoever the sound of the gospel comes, whether he will hear, or whether he will forbear, by that gospel he must stand or fall. Through faith in Christ, he may inherit the promises ; if he withhold that faith, it is not at his option to have no concern in the threatenings of his affronted Sovereign.¹ Accordingly, the gospel proceeds on the footing of my text. “ He that believeth ” is exempted from condemnation, and entitled to eternal life ; but “ he that believeth not, is condemned already,” because he “ hateth the light, and cometh not to the light,” but prefers darkness to it, from the consciousness “ that his deeds are evil.” “ For every one that doeth truth,” and acts as an accountable being, “ cometh to the light,” and accepts and rejoices in the gospel, which sheds it upon a darkened world.

These, then, are the antecedent considerations. Whether Christianity be true or not, you are under the essential obligations of religion as due from a creature to his Creator ; and if it be true—as it most assuredly is—it is not left to our option, but we are bound by the most solemn sanctions to believe in it and obey it. These are primary principles. May your hearts yield to them ! You see how the case stands. We do not so much argue as entreat and persuade.

Let us proceed :—

¹ Bishop Hurd.

II. To remind you that CHRISTIANITY IS SO EXCELLENT IN ITSELF, THAT THE SLIGHTEST EXTERNAL EVIDENCE IS SUFFICIENT TO OBLIGE MEN TO OBEY IT.

I need not surely dwell on this point. You have not so soon forgotten the adaptation of Christianity to the obvious state and wants of man.¹ You have not so soon forgotten the excellency and elevation of its doctrines,² the purity and beauty of its morals,³ the inimitable character of its Founder,⁴ and its tendency to promote in the highest degree the welfare of mankind.⁵ The impression is still deep of the internal constitution and framework of Christianity. How worthy of God, how suitable to the whole state and desires and aspirations of man. Yes; the remedial, consoling nature of the gospel, its soothing and purifying character, its gentle and yet powerful operations of grace upon the heart, its knowledge of all the secret springs of human conduct, proclaim, as with the voice of an angel, the author from whence it sprung. The three facts there disclosed, the FALL OF MAN, the REDEMPTION OF MAN, the RESURRECTION OF MAN, have the impress of God upon them, and answer to the exact necessities of a ruined world. To comply with the demands of such a religion, is to act on all the obligations of natural religion, only in a higher degree and with new energy. To follow it, is to obey what conscience dictates, only in a purer and more uniform manner. To believe in it, is to find a remedy for all our moral maladies, and an incentive to all our duties. Its mysteries are the sources of the most holy affections of the heart, and the most strenuous obedience of the life. All is congruous, pure, elevated, consoling, efficacious.

Such, then, being the excellency of Christianity, the obligation of obeying it rests on no minute and

¹ Lect. XIV.

² Lect. XV.

³ Lect. XVI.

⁴ Lect. XVII.

⁵ Lect. XVIII.

doubtful details of evidence ; almost any external proof is enough for deciding the question practically ; the lowest probability carries with it weight enough to turn the scale. I enter, therefore, into no dispute about this thing or that thing. I neglect all petty considerations, and I put it on this broad footing—the religion is so excellent that it binds man, in point of conscience as a moral agent, under the government of Almighty God, if the outward and historical evidences be at all satisfactory. Such a religion wants little evidence but itself. And every man that knows any thing of its real character, and is not totally lost to all sense of right and wrong, feels this.

Take any part of the wide subject of evidences that you please—the authenticity, the lives and deaths of the apostles, the propagation, the miracles, the prophecies—there is enough in any one to carry the practical judgment along with it. I am not now arguing—when we treated the evidences in their intellectual and moral force, we showed the whole extent of them—I am now persuading, recalling, reimpresing.

Remember, in human life man is governed by probabilities ; he is compelled often on the most momentous occasions to act on a very low probability ; he not unfrequently takes steps with the chances strongly against him ; as when the duration of life, or the success of a scheme of commercial enterprise is calculated upon. Where an object is in itself desirable, and the plan commends itself to their judgment, men seldom wait for evidences at all, but act at once on the innate dictate of feeling. Especially if a remedy be brought for a disease, or a deliverance announced for a captive, or a beneficial gift proffered to one in distress, men do not wait for arguments and the balancing of probabilities, but they feel, accept, appropriate the benefit.

Much more, then, doth Christianity bring with it

all the moral obligations that can bind man. Here is a remedy divinely procured. Here is a deliverance wrought at immense cost ; here is a gift which will enrich us for eternity. We want not arguments and intellectual discourse—or very little of them ; we want not evidences and credentials—or only in the slightest degree ; we want feeling, perception of our need, a heart to welcome, to believe in, to obey the joyful proposals.

The mistake, if there should be one in receiving it, cannot be fatal where the whole religion is so holy, so lovely, so beneficial to man. To receive such a Revelation cannot but be safe, right, obligatory. To reject it, indeed, would require quite another course. Because, whilst a few evidences are enough to warrant our obedience where all falls in with our previous duties and corresponds with the voice of conscience ; to reject such a religion would demand positive proofs, stronger and more conclusive than those by which it is supported—which has never even been pretended. To receive a Revelation so pure and excellent on its own intrinsic merits, is one thing ; but to refuse its claims, if we take that course, will require the complete establishment of a case against Christianity. We must then go into the whole positive body of historical evidences, and each of these must be outweighed by positive historical evidences on the other side. Common sense and conscience dictate this distinction. I may receive a holy and good religion without going fully into evidences, if I please ; but I cannot reject it without a thorough examination. But such an examination no one, with whom we are concerned, will venture to propose.

It is important, however, that this consideration should press with its full weight upon the heart. I am speaking of the moral obligation which lies on every human being to obey the Christian religion ; and I say it is so infinitely excellent and holy, that

we need not trouble ourselves with reviewing and committing to memory all the details of evidence ; the slightest recollections are enough to carry the cause. The case proves itself.

I go further : a single reflection settles the question. If there be any Revelation given from God to man, the Christian is that Revelation ; since no other can for an instant be compared with it in respect either of outward proof or internal excellency ; and this Revelation actually accomplishes the purposes for which it professes to be given—the restoration of man to himself, to God, to happiness. This consideration is enough to sway the judgment of any reasonable and accountable creature.

And do you not feel this ? Do you not know that you do not want proofs, but obedience ; that the obstacles to faith are not in Christianity, but in yourselves ? Yes, I am persuaded you suspect at least that such a holy religion is indeed from God ; and must and does claim and demand your submission. I remind you, then, of the obligation which these principles bring with them. I ask you in the sight of that Almighty God, before whose bar we shall soon stand, whether you are not bound to yield to a Revelation of his grace so rich and exuberant as that of Christianity ? I want to gain you to salvation. I dispute not—I persuade. I want a cordial, penetrating sense of guilt to awaken your fears. I want a view of a reconciled Father in Jesus Christ to attract your love. I want a perception of your need of the influence of the Holy Spirit to lead you to prayer for the blessing. I want the hopes and prospects of immortality to animate your efforts. I set aside reasoning. I speak to the conscience. Be the evidences forcible or slight ; be they few or many ; be they demonstrative or only probable ; they are enough, on the lowest estimate, to carry with them the moral obligation of such a religion.

But how much are these reflections strengthened, when we consider,

III. THE REAL SIMPLICITY, VARIETY, INDEPENDENCE, AND FORCE OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

We made the concessions of the former head, in order to disarm opposition and touch the heart. We left the conscience to its spontaneous influence. We said that such a religion, with almost any evidence, was excellent enough to carry conviction to the human heart.

But the truth is, there never was such an assemblage of proofs of every species capable of affecting and swaying man, as in the Christian religion.

1. Mark their **SIMPLICITY**. Like the works of God in nature, there is an inartificial, simple beauty in them, calculated to strike every beholder. The apostles go forth to preach the gospel—they suspend the ordinary laws of nature—they appeal to their divine Master's name and authority—they perform their miraculous works under all circumstances, and before enemies as well as friends—the facts are admitted by their bitterest opponents—the religion spreads on the footing of them. What a straight-forward appeal this to the common sense of mankind!

A series of wonderful events is predicted, during a period of four thousand years, with every variety of circumstance, affecting all the nations of the world; centering in the person and kingdom of the Son of God, fulfilled and fulfilling before the eyes of mankind, going on still in the present age as in each past one. Can any proof be more simple and intelligible? It is an evidence accompanying the religion in every age; as the miracles were a proof attending the first. I want no chain of arguments to convince me of the true inference. It is the omniscient God attesting his own

Revelation by unfolding something of the secret roll of his decrees.

We might retrace all our preceding Lectures. The majesty and simplicity of a divine hand, are apparent every where. Consider, I entreat you, how this goes to augment the obligation of receiving Christianity.

2. But observe the **VARIETY** of these evidences. We have been obliged to groupe them in masses in our preceding Lectures ; but the truth is, the evidences of Christianity are unnumbered—infinately diversified—arising from the most remote quarters—stamped with the same endless and exuberant richness which characterises all the works of the great God.

Enter any of the fields of natural science : what simplicity, what sublime dignity and grandeur ! and yet, when you come to analyze the parts, what variety, what combination, what new elements and powers, what processes of renovation and decay, of support and exhaustion—what wisdom, what contrivance, what results !

It is thus in the Christian Evidences. The variety of them is as surprising as their simplicity. You take any part—the authenticity of the books, for instance, in which the Revelation is contained—you begin the inquiry ; you become by degrees a little acquainted with the subject ; you dig in the mine as the vein opens before you. New and unlooked-for proofs crowd on your mind. The variety of attestation, Christian, Jewish, Heathen, to our sacred books ; the quotations made from them in the first century ; the style and manner of those quotations ; the admission of Jewish and Pagan adversaries ; every thing conspires, with infinite variety of form and circumstance, to the same result.

And this variety appears, not only in the number of the evidences and the exhaustless elements found in each, but also in the **DIFFERENT CLASS OF MA-**

TERIALS which constitute the body of each proof. Miracles, with their instant and irresistible appeal to the senses, are one kind of evidence. Prophecy with its slow and silently accumulated testimony, flowing like a stream down the course of ages, is another. The propagation effected in the face of a hostile world, and amidst the terrors of martyrdom, is a third. The credibility derived from a critical examination of the style and manner of our books, and a comparison of their main facts with the contemporary historians, is a totally distinct proof from all the preceding ; but not more distinct than the character of our Lord. And all these stand quite separate from the argument, from the tendency. And this again from the inward witness which Christianity offers to raise in every breast that will fairly make the experiment.

This variety meets, in a remarkable manner, the diversity of human faculties and habits of thought, as well as the multiform bodies of men in different ages and remote parts of the world. There is that which is suitable to the cast of mind of the profound philosopher, the accurate student of mathematical science, the reader of history, the classical scholar, the naturalist, the statesman, if only they will examine the question with candour and sincerity of mind. There is in the same storehouse of evidences, matters adapted to the savage just emerging from barbarism, the child with its first opening powers, the inexperience of youthful and inquisitive research, and the infirmity of decaying years. No turn of mind can fail, not only of substantial conviction, but of a conviction congenial to its peculiar associations of thought and course of study.

The different ages of mankind are, again, as much consulted in this variety, as the classes of individuals. From the first dawn of Revelation in the garden of Eden, during the ages when it was handed down by oral tradition, till the mission of Moses and the pub-

lication of the Pentateuch, there were proofs of the divine will adapted for each respective period. The miracles and prophecies—the immediate hand of the Lord extended and displayed, were sensible evidences to the ages which elapsed during the legal economy. When the gospel was promulgated, its credentials accompanied it, as they attend it still, with every variety of attestation, suitable to more modern periods of time.

In short, the diversity of the kinds of proof seem to flow from the various attributes and perfections of the Almighty, and to pledge his glorious character in the sight of mankind.¹ The miracles seem to proclaim his power; the prophecies, his knowledge and understanding; the propagation, his providential government; the morals, his holiness; the doctrines, his wisdom and love; the character of Christ, his grace and condescension; the effects upon mankind, his benevolence; the inward witness of the Spirit, his fidelity to his promises. Thus each separate ray is heightened by the combined glory of the rest, and unites in casting one concentrated effulgence upon the Revelation of the divine will to man. In how great a degree this consideration augments the duty of a cordial reception of the gospel, I need not say.

3. But consider the INDEPENDENCE of these proofs one of the other. They are not the continuation of one species of evidence, but the concurrence of independent testimonies, which might, each of them, have failed, humanly speaking, to unite in the proof. The miracles are one branch; the prophecies are another division, not of the same sort, not always pronounced by the same lips, nor published in the same age, and not following by necessary consequence the one from the other. The propagation is a third portion still independent of the two preceding ones: the

¹ Davison.

good effects another—the internal evidences constitute a new series—the inward experience of the Christian promises a still different. These are independent credentials deposed by distinct agents, many of them arising from circumstances quite unexpected ; others open to our actual investigation at the present hour ; some created in our own breasts, and springing from our personal obedience to the gospel.

This independent character makes it yet more impossible that the Christian Revelation should not be from God. Suppose, for a moment, that one class of the Christian testimonies had been invented by wicked and designing men ; yet these same individuals could never have controlled the events of distant ages, or the wills of persons in remote parts of the world. These men could never have infused the beneficial tendency into the religion. These men could least of all have commanded that almighty power which interposed for the first establishment of the gospel. Nothing is more difficult than to support a forgery of ever so limited an extent. Truth will appear. But to suppose a forgery which must have ramified over the whole earth, have secured independent sources of proof, have called in a divine power, and yet never have acted so as to betray itself, is infinitely too absurd an idea to be entertained for an instant.

This independence of the proofs goes yet further ; it regards the moral, as well as the physical impossibility of any deception being practised. Suppose forgery to contaminate one division of evidences : for example, the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of their Master and Lord, and the sincerity of their belief in that commanding fact. Then all their design was hypocritical, dishonest, of the basest description of imposture. Then the men were at bottom the most depraved and infamous of their race. And yet their doctrine is so pure and sublime ; the morals they teach so holy and extensive ; the consistency of

their testimony even to death so entire ; their unblemished and disinterested lives so free from reproach ; the persecution, contumely, loss of liberty and ease, and deaths by actual martyrdom which they endured, so unparalleled ; that nothing but the truth of their story, and the sincerity of their belief, and the sustaining power and aid of the Almighty, can account for their conduct. The independent evidences thus make a delusion impossible.

Not only so. The same talents and cast of mind and reach of thought which could have invented one kind of testimony, would have disqualified them from succeeding in the others. They could invent miraculous stories, for instance ; but could the same minds, or any minds but the most pure, have invented the character of Christ, or the morals, or the holy tendency ? This is saying little. Could any minds, however pure, have discovered, or have described, or have imposed, such new and unheard-of purity as appears in the Christian religion ? No ; whatever way you turn yourself, the independence of the Christian Evidences affords mutual checks the one on the other, and makes it impossible that the whole should be a forgery.

Open, then, your mind to the additional obligation arising from this remarkable fact. See the independence, as well as the variety, of the Christian evidence bearing on your conscience and persuading you to obedience.

4. I say nothing on the FORCE which these united considerations give to the whole proof. Force is a word far too limited ; it is an overwhelming tide of conviction ; it is a brilliant and refulgent burst of glory surrounding the Christian doctrine. No one of these various kinds of proof has ever been fairly disproved. They have stood, each of them, for eighteen hundred years, open to the scrutiny of the world. The separate force of each has gone on augmenting

by the events of history and the progress of the human mind in sound reasoning. The combined force comprehends every species of probable argument, sustained by positive matters of fact, which can influence man ; and is receiving fresh confirmations by the fulfilment of prophecies, the attestations of history, the discovery of manuscripts, coins and medals of ancient times, in every age.

This force is best estimated by contrasting it with the decreasing evidences of every other religion or pretended religion. The proofs, such as they were, of the heathen mythologies have long waned and gone out. The proofs of Mahometanism have been for ages abandoned. The evidences of the different idolatrous religions of Africa and India, of America or the South Sea Islands, cannot for an instant bear the light. The pretended sufficiency claimed by natural religion diminishes in force, every year, by the loud condemnation of facts and experience. But the evidences of Christianity remain in undecayed vigour and augmented brightness.

In fact, the Christian religion is the only religion in the world which rested originally on decided and distinct and reasonable claims to the obedience of men, and which has sustained those claims through a series of ages, and exhibits now a bold and intelligible front to the observation of mankind. There never was a religion but the Christian (under which I include the preparatory Revelation) that laid any one just pretension to the faith of its followers.

And at this moment Christianity is the only religion in the world that advances any fair claim on our belief. The unsubstantial grounds of other religions sink and disappear before the least inquiry ; those of the Christian increase and strengthen the more they are examined.

So that this question is between Christianity and no religion at all. If Christianity be not defensible, no

one with whom we have to do, will support the pretensions of any other. ¹

With this accumulated evidence, which it is impossible adequately to appreciate—which, in its simplicity, its variety, its independence, and its force, baffles, like all the other works of God, the powers of man fully to develop—Christianity meets the moral and accountable being to whom it is addressed. Christianity, so excellent in itself, as scarcely to require any evidence, possesses in fact every species ; and then comes to man, already under the antecedent obligations and natural bonds to his Maker and Benefactor ; and says to him, ‘ Give me your attention ; yield up to me your passions ; submit to me your will ; open to me your intellectual and moral powers. I will enlighten, and restore, and console, and bless you ; I will teach you the source of your present errors and ignorance ; I will lay open to you the whole of your malady ; I will guide you to the fountain of salvation. Bow only your proud rebellious intellect ; pretend not to divine all the reasons of my conduct ; submit to that state of probation, both as to knowledge and duty, which I assign you. Lo, I offer all needful succour. The aids of grace, the strength and illumination of the Holy Spirit are before you. Yield, then, the contest. You cannot overcome, if you persevere in resistance ; you are bound by every moral tie that can surround man ; you are in my power ; you cannot elude nor defy with safety my vengeance.’

Yes, my brethren, I hope I have, in some measure, gained my cause. Surely my pleading with you, for your own happiness, will not be wholly in vain.

I have touched on the grounds of the obligations under which you lie. Bear with me whilst I remind you,

IV. Of the PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES WHICH

¹ Paley.

EACH OF YOU HAS RESPECTIVELY ENJOYED, AND WHICH UNSPEAKABLY AUGMENT THE DUTY OF BELIEVING IN CHRISTIANITY. For, besides those evidences which lie open to the universal attention of mankind, God has been surrounding you with circumstances of advantage for weighing these proofs, and for complying with the obligations arising from them. The country in which you were born, the events of life which a good providence has ordered, the strivings of the Holy Spirit with your conscience, the advice, and examples, and prayers of ministers and friends have bound your duty upon you with additional ties.

1. For YOU WERE NOT BORN IN A HEATHEN LAND, far from the knowledge of Christ, where no sabbath-rest invited you to religion ; no profession of the gospel in your country called your notice to its claims ; but where all was buried in nature's night. You might have had your lot cast in such nations, with the millions of the heathen, and have had no means of information as to Christianity, but such as some benevolent missionary might bring you. But you were born in a Christian country. Religion received you in her arms ; she took you, and admitted you into the Christian church ; she washed you in the waters of baptism ; she committed you to Christian parents and friends ; she put the sacred Volume into your hands ; she has followed you with her prayers.

Nor was it in a dark period of the Christian dispensation that you were born, nor in a country where the grossest corruptions of it prevailed. No ; you were born in a pure and enlightened day ; in a protestant land ; under a government and laws which respected and upheld the Christian faith, at a time when the efforts of infidelity had been exposed by the horrors of the continental philosophy and the crimes of infidels and scoffers ; when the facts as to the darkness and depravity of heathen nations had been demonstrated in the clearest manner ; and the beneficial tendency of

Christianity had been proved in the missions abroad, and the revived attention to religion at home. But these are not all your particular advantages.

2. THE EVENTS OF LIFE HAVE BEEN SO ORDERED BY THE GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE OF GOD, as, on various occasions, to aid the tendency of these external circumstances of birth.

Yes, there is not one before me, but has been led, at one time or other, by the course of events, to additional means of salvation. Changes in your pursuits have brought you within the reach of the good and pious. Journeys and retirements have afforded you peculiar seasons of recollection. The consequences of folly and sin have been demonstrated to you in your own case, or in that of others. Disappointments in your most ardent expectations have made you feel the uncertainty of this world's happiness, and the necessity of seeking after that which Christianity presents. Unexpected blessings and deliverances have been vouchsafed you in seasons of peculiar emergency ; your life has been spared ; disease has been stopped when at its height ; death has been arrested as he was entering your abode. Retrace the history of your life, and the mercies of a providential care will be most apparent. Nor have the least important moments been those of peculiar affliction, deep domestic calamities, and personal sorrows. In these events God has spoken to you in the interior of the heart ; religion has appeared in its just excellence ; and interposing passions and pursuits have suspended their fascinations. What use have you made of these occurrences ? Have you looked up to the hand which guided you unseen ? Have you considered the obligations of obedience to his Revelation, as augmented by these appointments of the Almighty ?

3. And what have you done in consequence of THOSE MOTIONS OF THE BLESSED SPIRIT, which have not failed to suggest to you the necessity of sub-

mission to your God? You know not, possibly, what is meant by the influences of the Holy Spirit. I will tell you, that the Christianity which you are so little acquainted with, consists much, as to its practical blessings upon the heart, in the influences of divine grace; in the agency of the Holy Spirit. We have largely referred to this topic in former Lectures. I recur to it now, to show you the obligations you are under to the great God and Father of all. Yes, those disturbances of mind, that uneasiness of conscience, those regrets after the commission of sin, those convictions of the importance of religion, that fear of death, those intervals of religious impression, those thoughts of God and duty which have visited your souls, have not been unattended with the additional force and pungency which the influences of grace bestow. It is the Holy Spirit of God which has been remonstrating, calling, inviting you, by these operations of your intellectual and moral powers. And for all this aid you will have to give an account. These movements of grace have conspired with the events of your life, and have been most persuasive when your outward circumstances called you most loudly to consideration. There have been times, perhaps, when you were, like the king Agrippa, "almost persuaded to be a Christian."¹ There have been times, when, like the wretched Herod, you have "observed" the minister of religion, and done "many things and heard him gladly."² All these inward motions of the Spirit bring a deep responsibility with them; they cannot be neglected nor quenched with impunity. But this is not all.

4. THE ADVICE, EXAMPLE, AND PRAYERS OF MINISTERS AND FRIENDS have, in most of those before me, swelled the catalogue of advantages, for which an account must be rendered to God. You have had the best counsel offered you in the most affectionate man-

¹ Acts xxvi. 28.

² Mark vi. 20.

ner ; you have had that advice sustained by the holy example, and consistent lives, and happy deaths of those who gave it ; you have seen, in your circle, perhaps in your immediate family, examples of rare virtue, instances of conversion, the calm tenor of a Christian life and conduct ; you have had religion embodied before your eyes ; you have witnessed the last hours of departing piety. A mother's prayers, which followed you through life, have been poured out for you on the bed of death. A father's wise counsel has been solemnly repeated amidst the expiring accents of struggling nature ; and the anxiety and entreaties of health have been confirmed by the faint prayers of his last sickness. The minister of religion has followed you with his affectionate and persuasive entreaties. He has visited your sick chamber. He has witnessed the vows of amendment and conversion, which you forgot, alas ! almost as soon as the occasion passed. He has addressed to you his gentle remonstrances. He waits for your reformation. His prayers, his labours, his public and private instructions, are directed to one object, your salvation.

And will you not yield ? Shall not all these tender considerations persuade you to your duty, which you ought to discharge if not one of them existed ? Remember, if you forgot them, your Maker does not ; if you fail to regard them, there is a book in which every one is noted ; if you retrace not the series of particular advantages, God will republish them before an assembled world. Yes, moral obligations cannot be burst asunder with impunity. The Almighty has a book of reckoning, to which the volume of your past history will respond, and which the records of conscience will confirm.

It is not yet too late. All your advantages may yet be turned to the end for which they were granted. Salvation is yet proposed. The gospel calls you to obedience. Believe the divine Revelation. Hesitate

no longer. Renounce your unbelief and disobedience of heart, and submit to the yoke of faith.

But, weighty as these considerations are which spring from your original obligations to God, the nature of Christianity, the force of its evidences, and the advantages you have especially enjoyed, they may and will fail of their effect, unless we take into account, what I proposed to notice in the last place,

V. THE MOMENTOUS DISCOVERIES WHICH CHRISTIANITY MAKES, AND THE DEEP INTERESTS WHICH ARE CONSEQUENTLY DEPENDENT ON THE RECEPTION OF IT.

This carries the obligations to a height which no words can express nor imagination conceive aright. Dependent on the determination of this question, is every other that deserves the name. On the one point, whether we obey or reject Christianity, our happiness here and hereafter, our immortal destiny, heaven and hell; death, judgment, and eternity; an interminable state of the most exalted bliss, or the most unutterable woe; the accomplishment of all the promised blessings, or the infliction of all the threatened penalties, of Christianity depend.

1. Recollect, I entreat you, **THE MOMENTOUS DISCOVERIES WHICH CHRISTIANITY MAKES**, the new position in which it places you, the new doctrines it reveals, the new duties it enjoins, the new relations it creates, the new and unutterable truths it proclaims. It opens eternity. It reveals the character and government of the invisible Creator. It brings life and immortality to light. It discloses all the sources of **your misery**. It discloses the corruption and guilt of **your nature**. It reveals that standard of sin and holiness by which God judges you now, and will judge you at the last day. It calls you to repentance and confession, to faith and humility, to love to God and man, to a spiritual and obedient life. It reveals the divine

Agent by which all the claims of the gospel may be complied with, and all its duties fulfilled—the Holy Spirit of grace. What scenes are thus thrown open in the endless vista before you! What duties arise; what dangers impend! Will you not, then, awake at the call and invitation of mercy? Will you remain indifferent and stupid and perverse, when God has condescended to make known to you your fall, your ruin, your remedy, your way, your end?

Call to mind, particularly, **THE IMMENSE LOVE OF GOD IN THE REDEMPTION OF JESUS CHRIST**, which is the peculiar discovery of Revelation. This increases the obligation of obedience to the gospel. What! shall God have expended all his love, displayed all his wisdom, illustrated all his most glorious attributes in the salvation of man; and shall man, in pride and self-conceit, turn away his attention? Shall he driel about trifles, and hide and blunt his sense of accountableness amidst speculations and vain reasonings? Shall the eternal Judge have put off all his terrors, and clothed himself in mercy; shall he have sent his only-begotten Son into this miserable world as a sacrifice for sin; shall he have manifested himself as **ESSENTIAL LOVE**, as delighting in the happiness of his creatures, as diffusing and communicating blessings to all the beings he has formed, in every way consistent with his infinite purity and holiness as a moral Governor; and shall man wrap himself up in his passions and his self-will, and spurn all this exuberant loving-kindness, and shelter his enmity under the guise of metaphysical difficulties? What! shall all possible **HELPS** to ruined man have been devised, not merely in the mighty salvation of Christ, but in the freeness of the Gospel promises, in the institution of means of grace, in the seals and pledges of the sacraments, in the voice and persuasion of ministers, in the promises and encouragements to prayer; and shall man sullenly refuse to use these helps, or to press on by them towards

the road of heaven? Surely, surely you will not violate the obligations which spring from the immense discoveries of the love of God! Surely you will not turn into deeper condemnation all those means of life which are let down, as it were, from heaven to earth, in order to draw you up from earth to heaven!

2. And can you forget THE DEEP INTERESTS WHICH ARE AT STAKE IN CONSEQUENCE OF THESE DISCOVERIES?—the last dread day, heaven, hell, eternity.

Can you forget that LAST DREAD DAY, when you must stand and be judged for the deeds done in the body? Can you forget that solemn assize, that tribunal where omniscience will detail the facts, where infinite truth will pronounce the sentence, where Omnipotence itself will carry it into execution? That day which even natural religion acknowledges, which the conscience of man involuntarily anticipates, and on the transactions of which the gospel has shed a blaze of light? The assembled world will then be arraigned; the secrets of every heart will be made manifest; the moral accountableness of man will be displayed; the force of the evidences of Revelation will be recognized; the hidden motives which rendered these evidences unproductive of practical persuasion will be brought forth; the actual vice and perverseness, and resistance to conscience, and wilful obstinacy, and rebellion of heart, and neglect of warnings, and quenching of the motions of the Spirit, and callousness of heart and perception, will then be made fully manifest; contrary arguments and reasonings of the corrupt intellect of man will be overborne by the instant irradiations of truth; and out of his own mouth, and by his own confession, will each sinner be judged. Avert then this awful condemnation! Oh, be wise to-day! Awaken now to those obligations which will be recalled and re-inforced on your distracted conscience at the last great tribunal.

And is THE HEAVENLY PRIZE WHICH CHRISTIANITY PRESENTS TO YOUR VIEW UNWORTHY OF YOUR PURSUIT ? A prize so inestimable that it is difficult even to raise our minds to any conception of it. We contrast it with our present circumstances of darkness, folly, guilt, self-condemnation, dread of the almighty Avenger, enmity, alienation of mind, misery ; and we endeavour to think of what that happiness must be, where the NEGATIVES of these actual sorrows will lead on to all the POSITIVE blessings of which our finite nature is susceptible. Not only shall there be no pain, no night, no defect, no tears, no apprehensions, no curse there ; but there shall be “the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.” These pleasures shall be spiritual and exalted. The happiness of mind is infinitely superior to any bodily satisfaction, however pure or permanent. The prize which Christianity proposes is the highest measure of the purest joys of which man is susceptible—the joy of intellect when fully illuminated with truth ; the joy of conscience when thoroughly penetrated with light and peace ; the joy of the heart and affections when completely satiated with their appropriate objects ; the joy of the whole nature of man when placed in entire repose and satisfaction, after a wearied life of conflict and temptation.

And not only so : it is a happiness springing from the immediate presence and approbation of the great God, the fountain of all felicity, the source of peace, the spring of blessedness to all intelligent creation ; whose frown constitutes the essence of misery, whose favour is essential life and joy. Nor this only : but it is the seeing of Christ, the presence of Jesus our Redeemer, the “being with him where he is, to behold the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,”¹—it is the contemplation of Deity in the

¹ John xvii. 24.

person of the only begotten Son, casting our crowns of brightness at his feet, and praising his love as the "Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood."¹

The communion of the blessed orders of angels will also be a part of that heavenly state. Yes, we shall join the "innumerable company of angels;"² we shall see Gabriel and all his compeers in the angelic host, from the loftiest seraph that is before the throne to the lowest order of those pure and spotless intelligences. We shall be in communion with all that is holy, and elevated, and just in the creation of God.

Nor will the fellowship with the whole church of the redeemed be wanting, that intercommunity of love, that re-union of dis severed affections, that junction and return of separated brethren and friends! There all will know and be known; all unite and be united; all see eye to eye, and be in eternal harmony, and increasing and augmenting capacities of loving and glorifying their gracious God and Father.

And is not such a prize worth striving for? Is not heaven worth attaining? Are not some of those exertions which are wasted on temporary, mean, degrading, injurious pursuits, worth bestowing on this exalted object? Shall men be ever disputing about mole-hills of the earth, gathering and collecting stones and pebbles, sinking the immortal spirit in the downward course of earthly and petty pursuits; and will they never cast a look upwards towards that heavenly crown, which is held in the Saviour's hand as the reward of faith in his name?

And how shall tongue express THE AWFUL CONTRAST TO ALL THIS BLISS—the alternative, the correspondent doom which awaits those who receive not the Christian faith and gain not the heavenly prize? This augments the moral obligations of obe-

¹ Rev. v. 9, 12.

² Heb. xii. 22.

dience to Christianity. There is—there is—there is a gulf of misery, a final separation from God, “a worm that never dieth, and a fire that never shall be quenched,” a state of “outer darkness where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth—a lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death.”¹ Those to whom the words of grace shall not be addressed, will hear other words. “THESE SHALL GO AWAY INTO EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT,” is the result which will proceed from the same judgment as the opposite event, “AND THE RIGHTEOUS INTO LIFE ETERNAL.”² Nothing but the imperious dictate of true charity would lead the minister of religion to touch on this topic. But he has no choice. “*Melius est cum veritate diligere, quam cum lenitate decipere,*” says Augustine. Benevolence compels us to speak the truth; benevolence compels us to try to snatch from destruction our deceived fellow-men. Benevolence compels us to warn Dives of that state of torment into which unbelief and scorn will plunge him; in order that, repenting and believing the gospel, he may be carried at his death by angels into Abraham’s bosom.³

This makes the Christian faith so obligatory upon man, that the interests at stake are of such incalculable importance; the unbeliever not only loses heaven, but is plunged into hell; he not only is deprived of the benefit which redemption proffered, but remains under the condemnation which his sins deserve.

And what ETERNITY means, I know not—how much is comprehended in that one word, I know not—whither it stretches, what it involves, what relation it bears to time, what are its continually augmenting benefits of joy or depths of misery, I know not—imagination cannot conceive, words cannot express. Remember—WHETHER CHRISTIANITY BE TRUE OR NOT,

¹ Mark ix. 13. Rev. xx. 14.

² Matt. xxv. 46.

³ Luke xvi.

ETERNITY REMAINS. The immortality of the soul, the future state, the judgment-day and its endless consequences, are truths which natural religion professes to admit: Christianity has only thrown a blaze of light on the obscure traces of these great doctrines. The least probability of the divine origin of Christianity is sufficient, then, to sway an accountable being in seizing the hopes of mercy and availing himself of the means of salvation. What then should the accumulated evidences of Revelation do? Eternity eludes our comprehension, however we stretch our minds in the pursuit. The longest periods of time will know an end. From the fall of Adam to the present hour, six thousand years have scarcely elapsed—the term to our narrow minds seems long—but what are six thousand years to eternity? When ten thousand times ten thousand years have passed, it will be only begun. If every sand upon the sea shore were to be removed by one single grain at a time, and with an interval of a thousand ages between each, that space at some period or other would be passed—but eternity would still stretch infinitely beyond!

And against this eternity what **PROTECTION** have you? What assurance that it is not nigh? What have you but the breath in your nostrils as an interposing security? “For what is your life, is it not a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanishes away?”¹ What a slender interference! What a momentary suspension! Pleasure, vanity, pride, science, ambition, riches, honour, health, all hanging upon a thread! And what then must be the obligation of that religion, which will render this moment of life the means of securing an eternity of bliss!

Yes; I trust I have so far succeeded as to bring your conscience to a stand. I have so far gained the

¹ James iv. 14.

day as to awaken some apprehensions. You resolve to obey the Christian religion ; you determine not to violate obligations which correspond with the antecedent relations in which we stand to God ; which rest on the obvious excellency of the Revelation of Christ ; which are increased by the variety and force of its evidences ; which are yet further augmented by the particular advantages of each individual ; and are raised to their utmost height by the momentous discoveries and immense interests of eternity.

Let, then, your submission to Christianity be immediate and cordial.

I say IMMEDIATE, because delays are in nothing so dangerous as in religion—where the impression of good is so soon effaced, and a relapse into indifference is so imperceptible. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”¹ He that defers his conversion, will never be converted at all. Men often mistake their imagination for their heart, and believe they are converted from the time they think about conversion.² Lose, therefore, no time in deciding the case. Remember the accumulated responsibility which has been gathering like a cloud, around you from the first dawn of reason to the present hour. Every day has increased the account. Not a moment further is to be lost. Perhaps even now the Holy Spirit is striving for the last time with your heart. “And thou, Capernaum,” were the solemn words of Jesus to the people amongst whom his works had been chiefly wrought, “that art exalted unto heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell ; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have continued unto this day.”³ To avert a similar doom, turn at once to your offended Lord. Behold his golden sceptre now ex-

¹ Heb. iv. 7.

² Pascal.

³ Matthew.

tended towards you. Behold the day of grace still shines. Behold all things are ready ; approach his footstool and live.

But let your submission be **CORDIAL**. Yield really to the call of Revelation. Give your heart to your God. Enter upon Christianity with affection, with earnestness, with a persuasion of its infinite importance. Stop not short in formal acquiescence, external profession, a worldly and reputable piety, a tame faith, an outward attendance on the sacraments, occasional acts of duty. All this is mockery and insult, when put in the place of a real reception of Christianity. God demands a contrite spirit—God demands grief and prostration of soul on account of sin—God demands a faith which bows cordially and with delight to the testimony of his word—God demands a reliance upon the merits and sacrifice of his Son—God demands a penetrating sense of the need of his grace and Holy Spirit—God demands the renunciation of every sin and the performance of a willing and filial obedience. Yield, then, this heartfelt subjection. The great God deserves it all ; the eternal Saviour has merited it all ; the divine Sanctifier will produce it all. Only begin with full purpose of soul. Read, pray, meditate ; separate from acknowledged sin ; perform known duties. Especially, implore those prevenient aids and operations of grace, which are essential to all further progress. God puts religion into the understanding by reasons, but into the heart by grace. Seek the influence of the Holy Ghost in the first entrance on your course. His influence, like dew on the face of nature, softens, penetrates, refreshes, and fructifies. To put religion into the heart by menace, by force, is not to put religion there, but terror. **GRACE** makes all possible, spontaneous, delightful, effective—it is itself a foretaste and integral part of salvation.

Thus will your submission to Christianity be a matter of choice. Thus it will be, not a fit of devotion, but the fixed purpose of the soul touched by a divine hand, aware of what it is about, sensible of the dangers and temptations before it, and yet resolved in the strength of God to abide by its determination. "He that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God." The obligations of the Christian faith will never terminate till the struggle of life is over. The snares and seductions of the world will never cease to solicit. The malice and powers of Satan will constantly embarrass and annoy. You must be well resolved then. If you have seen the majestic truths of the Christian doctrine, and the crumbling ruins in which the infidel ramparts lie, do not tempt God by hesitation and tampering with conscience; but boldly and determinately take your stand. Enter the sacred building; abide under the shadow of the Almighty; dwell in the glory of his temple; persevere in your worship and obedience there, till you are summoned from this lower and preparatory scene of duty to that upper and more glorious place, where the Lord God and the Lamb shall be the light thereof—"and you shall remain as a pillar in the temple of your God, and go out no more."¹

RECAPITULATION OF INTERNAL EVIDENCES.

We have now completed that rapid and popular view of the evidences of Christianity, which we proposed.

After having led our youthful inquirer around the

¹ Rev. iii. 12.

bulwarks of the heavenly city, and shown him that the number and strength of the fortifications were not only impregnable to the forces of the enemy, but were such as to give full repose and sense of security to the inhabitants; we have taken him and brought him within the sacred defences, we have led him into the heart of the citadel, and pointed out the strength of the walls, and the proportion and design of the several buildings. We have shown him that the internal constitution of the place is equally excellent with the external bulwarks. We have made him go through the divisions and mark the uses of the various edifices, compare their parts, observe their suitableness for the especial purposes for which they were projected; and have thus aimed at filling his mind with high conceptions of the wisdom of the divine Architect.

We have led him, above all, to the sanctuary, which adorns and protects the city, which is “the joy of the whole earth—the palace of the great and eternal King.”

We were sure, indeed, beforehand, that a fortress framed by the hand of the Almighty, would concur in its outward and inward character. And though we did not, and could not, allow our young inquirer to sit in judgment with presumptuous confidence on what he might think ought to be the arrangement of the parts, nor to suspend his loyal obedience on their agreement with his preconceived notions; yet we assured him that if, in a simple reliance on the skill which devised the exterior fortifications, he would examine the internal arrangements, with the view of confirming his faith and elevating his idea of the glory of his King, he would be astonished at the proofs of contrivance and foresight in every part.

This, then, he has done. The result has surpassed his expectations—the harmony and strength of the interior itself, the divisions of the city, the beauty of the chief places of concourse, the glory and sanctity

of the temple, have filled him with admiration. Some things, indeed, have exceeded his comprehension—for no human mind can have the furniture or experience requisite for judging of such extensive and complicated details—but he has understood enough to allay his fears, to raise his gratitude, and to induce him to rely with confidence on the successful issue of the combat.

In other words, the internal evidences of Christianity have appeared as admirable as the external.

This leads us, then, BRIEFLY TO REVIEW THE ARGUMENT ARISING FROM THE INTERNAL PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY, which have formed the subject of this division of our course, as we reviewed the argument from the external at the close of our last volume.

In doing this, let us notice the general nature of the argument—the particular topics into which it divided itself—its remarkable agreement with man's probationary state—and the inseparable unity of the whole.

1. You will remember that the GENERAL NATURE of the argument springs from those various marks of excellency in the inward frame-works of Christianity which serve to confirm our faith in its divine original. They are the internal characters of divinity which strike every considerate inquirer, the more he studies the religion, and compares it with the powers, and tenderness, and wants of such a creature as man, and with the confessed dealings of Almighty God in his natural providence and moral government of the world.

For the main features of Christianity are not in all respects unknown to man ; but rather fall in with his purest notions of God and conscience and moral duty on the one hand, and with his uniform experience of weakness and depravity on the other. They confirm every thing which natural religion guessed at, rather than knew ; enlarging, purifying, correcting, elevating the remains of the original Revelation, and

the dictates of that moral nature, which, though darkened and corrupted by the fall, is not wholly obliterated and lost. They contain, besides, a new and mysterious dispensation of mercy in the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, which gives energy to the dormant principles of essential religion, makes them practicable and delightful, and carries them on to all the ends for which they were first implanted.

Accordingly, in tracing out these effects and bearings of the Christian Religion, we discovered innumerable marks of design, of contrivance, of divine sublimity and harmony, of agreement with the wants and necessities, the desires and anticipations of man.

These are the internal evidences ; and they furnish a most conclusive argument in support of those external credentials of the religion by which its reception is first secured. They add the test of experience and observation to the historical testimony of authenticity, credibility, divine authority, miracles, prophecy, supernatural propagation, prominent good effects. And when these internal proofs are still further confirmed by the inward witness of Christianity to the heart, in its answers to prayer, in its fulfilment of all its promises, in its communication of the grace of the Holy Spirit, in its actually changing and elevating the whole moral character of man, there seems to be every imaginable species of evidence combined.

All the faculties and feelings of man's nature are brought to bear testimony to the truth of Christianity. His common sense and ordinary capacity of judgment in the EXTERNAL evidences : his heart and affections, his faculty of tracing out final ends, his perception of harmony and beauty, in the INTERNAL proofs : an inward consciousness of moral health and peace and joy communicated to the mind ; and an experience of the highest practical good effects produced in him, in the INTERIOR WITNESS.

Let us suppose a case, to illustrate the force of the

internal argument. If a philosopher had a revelation made to him of the system of the creation, he would begin by considering the historical proofs of the divine authority of the communication. Here he would rest at first. Afterwards, when he found there was nothing in it directly contradictory to the fixed laws of nature apparent in the small portions of matter which he had before subjected to his experiments, but that every thing went to confirm the results of his narrow observations, whilst all seemed intended for his convenience, relief, assistance, in many important respects, of which he was before ignorant,—this would exceedingly confirm his faith in the truth of the revelation. He would not be surprised to find much in it that was new, much unthought of, many uses and plans which he had never been able to conceive or conjecture ; a vast enlargement of the field of vision ; many causes of things laid open ; and much declared to him that was mysterious, incomprehensible, beyond and above his finite powers. But if, in the midst of all this, he constantly found that the facts in nature, as they had lain before his view, were confirmed, that every thing agreed with his previous experiments and observation ; and if, moreover, he found that the practical results of the whole were some most important benefits to himself, these convictions would raise his faith in the divine origin of the communication to the utmost height.¹

Such is the nature of the argument from the internal evidences.

2. It is not necessary for me to RECAPITULATE THE DETAILS of this evidence. It is not necessary for me to do more than refer you to the ADAPTATION² to the state and wants of man, which we found to pervade Christianity—as contrivance and provision for his necessities pervade the visible creation.

Nor need I do more than refer to that plan of re-

¹ Verplank.

² Lect. XIV.

demption, formed before the ages, of which the DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY¹ are the development, and of which the practical summary is the love of God and the love of man.

Much less need I dwell on the MORALS² of the gospel, in which Christianity comes down to the conscience of every human being, sets right the mistakes of all the sages of antiquity, and presents a morality, as practicable as it is pure and elevated ; and which, flowing from the doctrines, carries with it a demonstrative evidence of the whole Revelation.

But I must pause for one instant, to remind you of the inimitable perfections of OUR LORD'S CHARACTER³ in his mediatorial office, his personal and most lovely human virtues, and his conduct as the founder of a religion. Yes, the character of Christ embodies the Christianity which he taught ; whilst the very facts of his incarnation and sacrifice form the groundwork of the doctrines which he revealed. The sun in the firmament is not a more glorious centre of the natural creation, than Jesus Christ is of the spiritual. All converges towards him, centres in him, tends to illustrate and glorify him.

I will not again speak of the INWARD WITNESS⁴ of Christianity in the fulfilment of all its promises of grace to man ; because we have given it a large consideration in the course of our Lectures. But it seems to bring down the proof to that very test of matter of fact and actual phenomena, of which both the natural and moral philosopher so loudly boast ; and which nothing but prejudice and irreligion of heart can prevent them from acknowledging in Christianity.

After these prominent points, need I refer, or at least, do more than refer,—to what we have so lately considered, the OBJECTIONS⁵ raised against Chris-

¹ Lect. XV.² Lect. XVI.³ Lect. XVII.⁴ Lect. XIX. and XX.⁵ Lect. XXI. and XXII.

tianity both in themselves, and as they respect the persons who advance them?

On the topics of FAITH, INTERPRETATION, and OBLIGATION,¹ I say nothing; because they are involved in every step we have taken, and cannot be denied, without overthrowing all trust and confidence amongst men; all honesty and fair dealing in the intercourse of society; all that moral sense and conscience which distinguish men from the inferior creation much more than the barren possession of reason. In short, he that enters fully into the preceding arguments, will be the first to yield to the inevitable consequences flowing from them.

But I advert to a subject, interposed amongst all these—the TENDENCY of Christianity²—which I have reserved for the purpose of making one reflection. For, if in addition to all the above evidences, there is in Christianity an innate and strong direction and bias towards human happiness in the highest sense of the term; if the known hindrances are capable of being enumerated; if those hindrances are gradually being overcome, and are now daily lessening; if the good effects of the religion have uniformly burst forth, as a mighty river, in proportion as the hindrances have been removed, and have fertilized the face of the adjacent lands; if the religion itself foretells the chief impediments to this tendency, and points out the causes of them in men's abuse of the divine mercies, whilst it limits their duration; if the same records declare an ultimate and glorious consummation as about to take place, when all the tendencies of Christianity shall be turned into effects, and the whole world be a scene of light, and peace, and holiness; and if every sincere Christian feels in himself this tendency, and is engaged in removing obstacles out of the way of it, and hastening its progress in himself and

¹ Lects. XXIII, XXIV, and XXV.

² Lect. XXIII.

others ;—if this be so ; then, I say, the crown is placed on the brow of the Christian evidences, and every species of proof is accomplished by this finishing point ; then, I say, the tendency within Christianity runs on parallel with the predicted course of divine prophecy, which forms one of the most remarkable of the external proofs from without it—and the only demand upon man's reason, is to acknowledge his own ignorance, as to the origin and permission of evil, and the designs and will of the incomprehensible God—reposing his faith in the wisdom, justice, and mercy of the almighty and most glorious Judge of the world—a demand so natural, that it is surprising it should ever have been questioned.

3. And this touches upon that **PROBATIONARY AND IMPERFECT STATE** in which man confessedly is, and with which the general nature of the internal evidences of Christianity remarkably corresponds. Undoubtedly, the sceptic may, if he please, reject all this mass of evidence ; undoubtedly he may refuse to obey the Christian Revelation ; undoubtedly he may magnify petty difficulties, and lend himself to speculative reasonings. That is, he may act, with regard to Christianity, just as he acts with regard to God's natural providence, or his moral government of man ; he may pretend that all is involved in darkness, and that he can see no clear path before him. Thus the youth may also conduct himself in human life. He may refuse to take precautions, to form habits, to look forward to future scenes of difficulty, to act with prudence and self-restraint ; he may spurn any moral subjection to the claims of the Almighty, or to the checks upon the appetites, which his natural law imposes.

But does he, or can he, escape the consequences of that righteous retribution of the great moral Governor which involve and surround him ? Can he elude the sanctions of the general religion, resting on the faint traces of Revelation, and the moral nature of man,

which inclose the transgressor, as in a net? Can a careless, incautious youth escape a miserable and disgraceful age—can negligence, imprudence, and want of foresight be always repaired by any after-repentance—can the indulgence of pride and self-importance be separated from inward torments and outward contentions—can an irreligious contempt of moral restraints insure itself against self-disapprobation, disease, weakened faculties, a disturbed conscience, remorse, anticipations of judgment, dread of eternity, despair?

Apply this to Christianity. The lives and deaths of infidels demonstratively show that the very same moral and judicial punishments are inflicted on the objector against Revelation. And all this so agrees with the probationary state of man, as to form a strong additional confirmation that the whole system of government in natural providence, in essential and primeval religion, and in Christianity, proceeds from the same divine hand, is governed by the same general laws, and conspires to the same end? ¹

4. Let the humble inquirer, then, COLLECT ALL THE SCATTERED RAYS OF LIGHT, flowing from the several branches of the divine argument, and let him remember that these series of proofs, which are necessarily considered in separate parts, for the purpose of a better investigation, form but one uniform, candid, and inseparable body of testimony; which, like the light of the sun, though separated and divaricated into the various colours of blue, and green, and red, and the other colours of the prism, whilst passing through our mind, and being subjected to our examination; is yet, in itself, one and the same effulgent glory, shedding light and warmth from its mighty orb. ²

Yes; the whole of the Christian evidences form one argument, one attestation, one inseparable and irresistible

¹ Butler.

² Warburton.

tible appeal to the human understanding, conscience, and heart. From the simplest proof of the authenticity of our books, to the last evidence of the inspiration of all their contents ; and from the first point of the adaptation, to the closing topic of the indispensable moral obligation of receiving the religion, all constitutes one undivided chain of reasoning, the most indissoluble and most binding ever offered to an accountable being.

And the grand probation of man now is, whether he will obey this Revelation and submit his reason and heart to God ; or whether he will follow his pride and passions, and dare the authority of the great Lord of all.

God grant that every reader of these Lectures may so weigh the moral obligation under which he lies, as to be WISE IN TIME ; as to follow the directions of the Bible, and obtain THE GRACE NECESSARY for welcoming it with humble faith and cheerful obedience ;—that thus all THE BLESSED ENDS of the Christian Revelation may be accomplished in him here and hereafter !

LECTURE XXVI.

CONCLUSION OF THE ENTIRE COURSE.

JOHN XX. 30, 31.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

AFTER the statements made in the last Lecture, on the obligation of receiving the Christian Revelation, and the review there taken of the result of the argument from the internal evidences, nothing now remains for us but to retire back from this minute inspection, to such a comprehensive survey as may allow us to take in at once the distinct outlines of all the divisions of our subject, and observe how they severally harmonize, both in their various component parts and with each other ; and then to conclude the whole of the great argument, by an address to the different classes of persons who may be supposed to be most interested.

But where shall we take our station to seize this point of view ? After we have examined at so much length the different branches of the stream, and have paused at each examination to survey the scenes before

us, whither shall we ascend in order to catch the course and flow of the whole river?

Let us first view **THE PROGRESS OF PROOF** as it has been rolling down from its earliest rise, and been augmenting in its magnitude and force to the present hour. Let us then notice **THE INCIDENTAL AND UNEXPECTED MANNER** in which the flood has been increased. And, lastly, let us contemplate its actual volume, and **THE POSITION IN WHICH WE NOW STAND** as to the hopes of its visiting and fertilizing the whole earth.

I. Let us view the progress of proof **AS IT HAS BEEN ROLLING DOWN FROM ITS EARLIEST RISE TO THE PRESENT HOUR.**

For observe how small and imperceptible is the first source of the stream. You scarcely distinguish its narrow thread. And yet trace its progress. It increases as it flows. In every advance the waters are augmented. From the original promise made to our first parents, to the present hour, the evidences of Revelation have been in progress. For six thousand years has our religion been before the world. The expulsion from Eden was accompanied by the first discovery of mercy. During the patriarchal age, when human life extended through centuries, truth was handed down by tradition, by the instituted sacrifices, and the consecration of the sabbath to religious worship. The call of Abraham, and the rite of circumcision, increase the means of knowledge to mankind. The Pentateuch is published, and consigns to a written record the history of primeval ages, and the doctrine of the fall and the promised recovery. The Mosaic miracles, the Mosaic redemption, the Mosaic Canaan, are proofs to a lost world of the true faith. Kings and prophets arise. The Jewish name and religion spread; and with them the evidences of Revelation.

The Babylonish captivity plants missionary prophets in the heart of the greatest Heathen monarchy. For seventy years the meek and courageous spirit of Daniel commends his God, his religion, his prophetic outlines of future mercy, to mankind. Before the birth of the Saviour himself, a fame pervades the world that some one, springing from the East, should govern the nations.

The apostles go forth and proclaim an universal religion. They carry the credentials with them, and attest the truth of the preceding dispensations of the Almighty, whilst they establish their own. The world is penetrated with the Christian evidences. Every nation is visited, warned, invited. During the lapse of three centuries, the miraculous propagation goes on, and becomes itself an additional proof to the following ages. The holy lives, and constancy unto martyrdom, of the apostles and their converts, silently provide further evidences. Constantine acknowledges the force of the rising religion, and Paganism is dethroned.¹ In the mean time, prophecy begins to unfold yet wider the roll of futurity, and each grand revolution in the fortunes of the church is found to have been foretold in her mystic pages. The character of the Messiah is more and more acknowledged. The dispersion and yet distinct preservation of the Jewish people, are a prophetic miracle. The persecutions of the Christian faith confirm the word of prophecy, and enlarge the proofs of its divine origin.

Apostacies arise in the east and west.² Christianity seems to fade before the imposture of Mahomet, and the superstitions, tyranny, and idolatry of papal Rome. The spiritual church is driven into privacy; and she there discovers these very apostacies to have been largely delineated in the prophetic word; and she sees

¹ A. D. 312.

² At the commencement of the seventh century.

in the anti-christ, and the man of sin, and the apocalyptic visions, new evidences of the Christian faith.

With the revival of learning, the proofs of Revelation pour in with a fuller tide upon mankind, as an awakened curiosity and a widened sphere of observation open new channels.¹ The Reformation springs forth and appeals to the divine records, collects fresh evidences, re-assumes truth, sweeps away the incumbrance of human tradition, exhibits Christianity to the faith and obedience of mankind. The lives and deaths of the Reformers, the effects of their doctrine, the accomplishment of the promised grace of Revelation in its operations upon the human heart, are appealed to, and place the evidences of Christianity in a new blaze of glory. What superstition and ignorance had wrought for ten centuries, is overthrown ; and Christianity appears fresh, and vigorous, and sacred as at its first birth.

New opponents soon appear in the midst of Protestant Europe ; or, rather, human corruption assumes a new form. Men arise who borrow from Christianity a purer creed as to the foundations of religion, and affect to be followers of natural light, and to believe in the being and government of God and a future judgment, but reject the claims of Christianity. Against the deist has the combat been since carried on ; for Paganism has no defenders, and the corrupt religion of Rome admits the foundation of the Christian faith—and has occasioned a copious and masterly array of proofs for the conviction of every candid inquirer, and for the preservation of the young and unstable in the Christian church.

The tide has thus been swelling in each age, and is still rising ; nor does there seem any other limits to the accumulation of Christian evidences, than those which exist as to the works of creation and providence.

¹ The close of the fifteenth century.

You want no additional proofs there. The grand primary facts speak the glory of God. Yet each diligent and observant mind lights upon new phenomena, or combinations of phenomena, which confirm his previous belief. So it is in Christianity.

The evidences of Revelation have kept pace with the progress of the human mind under all circumstances, as well since the revival of learning as before. Its almighty Author has planted in it the seeds of endless development. Every branch of evidence belongs to a vast system of truth, fitted in different ways to the various understandings, characters, and stations of those to whom the gospel is offered. An argument is held out to every inquirer; to the scholar, who can make the whole of human learning tributary to his investigation; and the unlettered seeker after truth, who draws all his knowledge from his own heart and the sense of his own wants.¹ The simplicity of the Bible in its evidences, conceals a depth of wisdom, a fund of principles, an extent of adaptation, which have only been more and more displayed as the progress of sound learning and just reasoning have given occasion for the examination. Every thing in human knowledge has fallen into its tide and aided its flow. Historical researches penetrate the most obscure recesses of past events, and pour their contributions into the Christian treasury. The studies of natural philosophy open new worlds of science, and prepare a wider bed for the divine religion.

The philosophy of mind at length admits all the foundations of our argument by confining itself to facts and experience,² as her sister science has long

¹ Verplank.

² At this moment two instances occur to me: one in moral philosophy, the other in natural; which I cite merely as specimens. Mr. Locke's doctrine concerning the sources of ideas, has been generally admitted, though not without a secret suspicion that there must be something wrong in the phi-

done. The subordinate branches of knowledge, geography, chronology, geology, mineralogy, lend their aid to the defence of the Christian religion.

Philosophy of the statement; as an universal notion of deity and some elementary principles of morals impressed by Almighty God upon the conscience of man, seem taken for granted in Christianity. The latest and most intelligent writers now agree, that some innate laws of thought by which the connexion and relation of our original ideas are governed, exist. Locke had maintained the sources of our primary ideas to be the objects of sense; and he had referred us for our complex ones to the connexion and relation of those original ideas one with another. And this relation is now settled and acknowledged by Brown, our latest metaphysician, to depend on certain natural laws of the human mind—laws which may be termed innate. Thus Locke and Stillingfleet are, after a century and a half, reconciled; and philosophy is found to accord with Revelation more explicitly as to the original impress of God on the human faculties and powers. This remark was made by Bishop James.

Again, in natural philosophy, water had for ages been considered as a primary and simple element. Modern chemists have proved it by experiment, to consist of inflammable and vital air.* They have also proved that these gases, mixed in the proportion to constitute water,† form the most dreadfully explosive mixture known in nature. Volcanic mountains are probably nothing but vast machines, where these gases have been generated and produced those explosions and detonations which have astonished mankind in every age. The decomposition of water precedes the explosions. Before any great eruption of Vesuvius, not only does the water disappear in all the wells of Naples, and other towns at the foot of the mountains, but even the sea retires, and marine animals, abandoned by their native element, expire upon the shore. When the eruption took place which formed a new mountain three miles in circumference, near to the ancient Puteoli, the whole of the Lucrine lake became dry. When the gaseous elements of water, then, are exposed to combustion in the bowels of the volcano, liquid rocks are ejected in the form of lava, whole mountains are blown into the air, and the explosion is heard to the distance of many leagues. What an illustration does this afford of the power of God! How

* Or of what is termed the hydrogen and oxygen gases.

† About two portions of hydrogen to one of oxygen.

And all this is the more observable, because, whilst the proofs of Christianity are thus in progress, the objections and reasonings of infidelity are diminishing in force and fading away. Truth takes root and flourishes; fallacies droop and die. They appear blooming for an instant; but, wanting root, they perish. As conscience recovers its sway, and the force of particular temptations is diminished, Christianity regains her dominion over the heart. Infidelity now has scarcely a plausible argument left.¹ The evidences of revelation strengthen upon reflection, mature with our years, advance in force and practical demonstration as we approach eternity, and gather new brightness in the time of sickness, sorrow, and impending dissolution. There never was a mind brought fairly to bear on the subject, but fresh materials sprung up around it, just in proportion to its means of knowledge and capacities of

does it demonstrate to us that the world may at his will be burnt up—That if he who said, “Let there be light and there was light,”—and “who holds the waters in the hollow of his hand,” were to say, ‘LET THE WATERS BE DECOMPOSED,’ the “elements would melt with fervent heat, and the heavens pass away with a great noise.”*

These instances are taken from a thousand others; they are by no means necessary to the Christian argument. Whatever Mr. Locke thought, the Scripture account of man's moral nature, and the impress of God upon his mind, was not to be doubted; in whatever ignorance we might have remained as to the dreadfully explosive constituents of water, the truth of the future destruction of the world by fire would not have been less certain.

But it must be obvious, that facts such as these, which illustrate the positions and manifest something of the probability of the events which Revelation foretells, are not without their importance.

¹ Bishop J. B. Sumner apologises for answering an argument of Volney, on the ground that, bad as it is, it is the only one he can find advanced against Christianity.

* 2 Peter iii. 10, 11.

combination ; nor is there any period which so fully illustrates its solid virtue, as the moment of the decay of life and the lapse of all earthly things.

At the present time Christianity is the religion of all the civilized nations of the world. After eighteen hundred years, she stands as the acknowledged source of religious truth and duty. The mind of man under the greatest advantages, the verdict of intellect is in favour of Christianity. On such a question, we are not to estimate the weight of authority by numbers but by the amount of inquiry, by the investigation actually made, by the habits of intellectual effort, the knowledge, the information, the moral feeling, in those who prosecute it. In this view one Christian nation outweighs all the prostrate people of the Indies and Americas ; and the public attestation to the Christian faith by the flower of the human race, demonstrates the force of its evidences upon the minds best capable of estimating them aright.

In short, the evidences have so accumulated, that individuals can only prosecute in detail certain divisions of them. To enter upon the whole question fully, a man should be a stranger to no branch of history or science ; he must identify himself with the designs of Providence in every age ; he must be the narrator of the wonderful dispensations of God, and the moral education of the human race. He must recount all the labours of the vast society of Christians, which is the intermediate chain between earth and heaven. He must embrace the whole kindred of men, nineteen-twentieths of whom entered into history with Christianity. He must trace out the new principle of action which the gospel sets at work—love, which constitutes such a spring in the mechanism of social life, as ultimately to change human society, and prepare its re-construction on a new basis, without injuring any established relations of it. He must follow out the new literature which Christianity has

introduced ; and trace out the history of the mass of the nations of the world in their progress or their decline—their civilization, arts, sciences, philosophy, all that characterises or modifies the moral existence of man. And when he has attempted this, or any division of this infinite subject, he will confess that he has only saluted the question at the threshold, and that he must leave to others the developments—its progress and accumulation.

What a prospect this ! What scenes stretch all around ! What an expansive and life-giving tide is Christianity ! What a gradual but steady progress do we perceive in its evidences, from the first source of grace in paradise to the present hour ! But, in the next place,

II. Let us observe THE INCIDENTAL AND UNEXPECTED MANNER IN WHICH THE FLOOD HAS BEEN THUS FORMED.

For whence have come the tributary streams ? Have artificial beds been excavated to convey to it with immense labour the waters of other rivers ? Have channels been turned from their course, like that of the ancient Euphrates, by the arm of power ? No ; most has been incidental and unlooked for, so far as man has been concerned.

We have repeatedly noticed the artless and inartificial character of the Christian evidences ; their independence of each other ; the sudden influx and convergence of the materials of proof. And now that we are casting back a glance upon the whole subject, we repeat the remark. We bid you reflect that all this mass of testimony is not a contrived, systematic arrangement, set forth in the holy Scriptures, or prepared by inspired writers, and handed down for the conviction of mankind. No, every thing arose spontaneously. Circumstances have created the Christian evidences. Enough was always included in the

Revelation itself for the conviction of every sincere inquirer. But, for the rest, all was called forth by occasion, amidst the struggles of human passions and the conflicts of the church with her foes.

Christianity, in her native dignity, threw herself upon mankind. Her divine records plead her own cause. Here is always enough to verify a divine Revelation. Every thing else is incidental, and was drawn into argument as occasion arose.

The first Christian apologists had no view to the eighteenth century, or the conviction of nations then unborn, when they were compelled to appeal to the heathen emperors, on the injustice of the sufferings to which they were exposed. Their object was to defend themselves from the calumnies with which they were assailed, and to effect the conversion of their contemporaries. What did Justin Martyr, or Tertullian, or St. Augustine, foresee of the use which would be made of their testimony a thousand or fifteen hundred years after their own times? Still less did Tacitus and Suetonius imagine the important purposes to which their admissions of all the chief facts of Christianity would be turned, after the indignant contempt of the historians themselves had become harmless. What did Julian or Porphyry foresee of the value of those incidental notices of the facts connected with Christianity, which escaped them in the warmth of their invective against the religion? When Celsus, in his enmity against the gospel, overwhelmed Origen with his sophisms and cavils, little did he imagine that, the arguments on either side being disregarded, the facts which were admitted in common, would form a bulwark of the Christian faith. Still less did the Jewish writers conceive that, in attributing the Christian miracles to the powers of an occult magic, they were acknowledging facts on which we should build our faith, ages after the hypothesis of a false philosophy had been exploded.

In the mean time, the Christian religion marched on,—in the midst of the scorn of the learned, the force of the powerful, the hatred of governments, the malignity of the Heathen and Jewish priesthods—and, sustained by an invisible hand, made good its cause, till Constantine mounted the throne, and the empire assumed the name of Christian. All was natural, unpretending, honest truth.

Proofs, however, began imperceptibly to be collected. The authenticity of the sacred books was examined; the records of martyrs were searched into; the tradition of ancient facts was investigated; ecclesiastical memoirs were composed; controversies arose; the numbers on each side are mentioned; the councils which assemble are enumerated; the condemnation of heretics is placed on record. Thus, facts and doctrines are incidentally ascertained. Things come out by occasions, by circumstances unforeseen and unplanned. It is only after a lapse of centuries that men's attention is directed to the collecting into a series the successive proofs. The tide of time rolls down, and bears on its surface the various materials, from which diligent observation culls here and there a particle of unexpected and important evidence; as the wild American gathers from the bed of his magnificent rivers the minute but valuable particles of gold and silver. As literature widens, the scattered elements of proof are brought in—coins, medals, inscriptions, antiquities, rewritten manuscripts discovered in monasteries, contribute their unexpected testimony.

Not only the first occasions are unlooked for, but the subsequent reasons for bringing out and detailing the proofs, are equally incidental.

A literary age abounds with infidelity. The credibility of the gospel history is, after seventeen hundred years, reduced into regular proof,¹ for the purpose of meeting the new circumstances of the times. It is

¹ By the labours of Lardner and his contemporaries.

shown that the early fathers cite almost all the New Testament ; and that the heretics never call in question the authenticity of the books.

Yet further, multitudes of individuals are employed in these works who have given no evidence of personal piety, or of any firm faith in the peculiarities of the religion which they defend. Some from literary curiosity ; some from the irritation of controversy ; some from professional studies, are led to contribute their quota, who yet avow a disbelief in many of the characteristic doctrines of redemption.

How much these points increase the force of the whole argument in favour of Christianity, I need not say. They do this in several ways.

They show that there has been NO EFFORT IN CHRISTIANITY TO MAKE OUT A CASE ; no provision for petty difficulties ; no timidity in passing through the succession of ages and nations. No : Christianity walks on her way, strong in her native authority, and conscious that, on whatever side she is contemplated, there is evidence enough for every sincere inquirer.

They also demonstrate the secret CARE OF THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE over the religion, which, in ways unseen by man, and over which he had no control, laid up these materials of proof. Enough has been preserved of the earliest Christian writers—enough of other kinds of evidence, to furnish us in these latter days with abundant sources of testimony.

It likewise shows that we are in a SERIES OF CONTINUAL ACCESSIONS to the evidences of religion. The case is not closed. New incidents may arise, as they have done in every preceding age, to confirm the proof ; new manuscripts may be found ; new notices in heathen authors ; new series of quotations in the fathers ; new monuments of antiquity ; new lights from the actual state of mankind.

III. But let us contemplate the stream of evidence

IN ITS ACTUAL MASS AND VOLUME BEFORE OUR EYES, AND PRESENTING THE HOPE OF ITS BEING ABOUT TO VISIT AND FERTILIZE THE WHOLE EARTH.

Let us view the present flow and course of the stream; let us see how far it is now more unimpeded than in former periods; more cleared of obstructions; more ready to burst out into new regions, and bless the most distant shores.

Yes; never was the great Christian argument so disembarrassed from extraneous matter, never did it bear so directly upon the consciences of men; never was there a period of the world when all seemed waiting for those secret operations of the divine mercy, to which all argument is subordinate, and without which no evidences can convince or persuade.

1. For, do we not stand on the ELEVATION OF EIGHTEEN CENTURIES, or rather of SIX THOUSAND YEARS? Does not what we have noticed of the incidental manner in which the Christian proofs were collected, and the immense aggregation of them, place us on a vantage-ground for the further prosecution of the argument? Does not all past experience, all past history, all the divisions and heresies in the visible church, all the noble virtues in the invisible, all the changes and alterations in the attacks of the great spiritual adversary, all the exhausted effects of infidelity on individuals and nations, give us means of observation now, far beyond all preceding periods of time? And if we use the facts of actual experience with humility, will they not materially aid us in our cause?

2. And do not THE VARIOUS METHODS OF TREATING THE EVIDENCES in former times, furnish us with lights for our guidance in the present? We trace the excellencies and defects of our predecessors, in order to learn wisdom ourselves.

The first theologists formed a PRIMITIVE school of writers on the evidences of Christianity. Justin

Martyr, Tertullian, Gregory Nazianzen, Arnobius, Lactantius, Augustine, poured out the simple complaints of a persecuted and despised people, at the feet of the reigning heathen powers. Direct details of proofs they gave not: they saw, they felt, they exhibited the virtue of Christianity. They had chiefly to repel the unheard-of calumnies which rested on the new religion. Their apologies are personal vindications of a deeply-injured cause.

The dark ages were sunk too low in a petty scholastic theology, to pay much regard to a species of argument which was not wanted, when the human mind was struggling with other evils—superstition, ignorance, spiritual tyranny.

At the reformation, apologies were again produced, more to defend the Protestant doctrines, than to establish the general Christian authority. The rise of Deism was not immediate; and the demand for regular defences of Revelation not directly made.

The school of what we may call the LITERARY defenders of Christianity, arose with Plessis du Mornay,¹ and was followed up by Grotius,² Huët,³ and others, who, with too little regard perhaps to the inward blessings of Christianity, attempted to demonstrate its divine authority by learned arguments, references to heathen authors, and a deduction of inferences little level to the understanding, and less addressed to the hearts of man.

The THEOLOGICAL class of writers on evidences, arose in our own country towards the middle of the seventeenth century, from the host of eminent divines and pious and devoted Christians which that age produced. Baxter, Owen, Halyburton, Turretin then wrote, and rested their cause chiefly on the character of the Scriptures, the infinite excellency and glory of the matters revealed, the testimony of the Spirit to the human heart.

¹ Born 1549.

² Born 1533.

³ Born 1630.

The revulsion of this order of reasoners produced the METAPHYSICAL class of the same period, or a little later, in which far too much was conceded to the Deist—he was met on his own ground far too courteously, and was refuted indeed, but refuted laboriously on the footing of metaphysical reasoning. Chandler, Jenkins, Leland, Stillingfleet, and perhaps Doddridge and Beattie, may be ranked in this series.

The unsatisfactory results of taking this ground, at length led to a simple exposition of the facts of Christianity in the HISTORICAL school in which Paley stands pre-eminent, from his skill in conducting his argument. Lardner, Leslie, West, are of this class in our own country; as Michaelis, Less, Bullet, Bonnet, Stoch, are on the continent. The omissions of these apologists lay in an undervaluing or concealment of the internal evidences—in a secular tone of ratiocination—an intellectual effort to make men Christians, without sufficient reference to the divine Saviour in his death and sacrifice, and the divine sanctifier in his influences and grace.

The CHRISTIAN writers—for so I must call them—have arisen of late years; who, noting all that seemed good in the former schools, have been careful to carry out Christianity into its practical consequences and appeal to the conscience and heart. Pascal led the way to this kind of writings—a man who was in advance of his age in this, as in other points. Butler followed in his steps, and laid the foundation of the complete overthrow of infidel objections, by a consideration of the ignorance of man. The present Bishop of Durham has aided, by his exposition of the History of Infidelity.¹ Soame Jenyns contributed many valuable thoughts. But the Bishop of Chester² is confessedly the leader in this school, and has given the first complete specimen of what a knowledge of the

¹ Bishop Van Mildert's Boyle Lectures.

² Bishop John Bird Sumner.

real character of Christianity can do in the great argument.¹

These various methods of conducting the defence of Christianity, are of the greatest use in guiding our judgment in the present day.

3. Nor do the important FACTS NOW ASCERTAINED and admitted on all hands, operate less beneficially. It is now clearly understood that the state of the heathen world is substantially the same at this hour, as it was at the time of St. Paul—that is, every age has been confirming his statements. The inefficacy of all means to benefit those nations, or any other, except as Christianity is humbly relied on, has also been demonstrated. The experiment made of the baneful effects of infidelity, on the largest scale, during the period of the last fifty years, has been, alas ! but too complete in all parts of the continent—the nations have been compelled to unsay all their blasphemies, and return to some profession of the Christian faith. The vanity and frivolity of the speculative objections of Deism has been acknowledged, and the solid foundation of facts on which Christianity rests generally admitted.² The arguments of sceptics are now beneath the consideration of any serious mind. Infidelity has, indeed, been fairly driven off its ground, and been compelled to encamp within the professed Christian enclosure; and now appears under the forms of Socinianism and Neologism—a circumstance of some importance. It is an acknowledged fact, moreover, that the gospel is efficacious to enlighten and console man, to raise and animate, to pardon and bless him. The success of missions has established this.³

¹ Dr, O. Gregory, Mr. Franks, Mr. J. J. Gurney, have done excellent service in this way ; and the able and eloquent M. Frassynous, in his late work.

² Some French writers begin to affect to despise matters of fact, under the term, *Religion factice* !

³ Take any cases—those in the South Sea Islands—in

4. A further assistance is derived from the **CLEARER LAWS OF REASONING** which are now acknowledged, and the improvements universally made in the estimate of evidence. This we have more than once noticed.¹ But it demands remark here, that what Lord Bacon and Pascal insisted upon two centuries since, in the prosecution of natural philosophy, is now universally admitted in all branches of knowledge—that hypothesis, conjecture, opinions systems, are of no value against matters of experiment and actual phenomena—that we know nothing of the causes of things—that we are to consider facts as first principles, and to deduce consequences only on the basis of a wide induction.² This is all that Christian apologists want, to establish the ruined state of man, the need of Revelation, the effects of Christianity upon the heart, the import of its various instructions, and the grace with which it is to be received. I say nothing of the external evidences, because they have never been much contested. The clearer notions, however, of the nature of just reasoning upon the laws of evidence, leave the ground unincumbered—we are disembarrassed from a thousand shackles—the case has a free scope and fair consideration.

5. But all these points would be of less moment, if the **GRACE AND MERCY OF GOD** were not turning the minds of men to the best and most effective statement of the whole subject.³ This is the peculiar advantage of the present period, that a revival of genuine Christianity has called men's attention to that simple method of arguing Christianity, which, without omitting human learning and historical testimony, chiefly dwells on the inward efficacy and excellency of the religion

West Africa—in India. Take the churches founded by Swartz, for example.

¹ Lect. I. and elsewhere.

² M. Jouffroy has admirably shown this in his preface to Dugald Stewart's *Lectures*.

³ Lect. I.

itself. This is the course which common sense, past experience, and the honour of God, unite to persuade.

For nothing can be so contrary to common sense, as to leave out the practical excellence of Christianity, when you are about to invite men to embrace the religion—it is to conceal the most attractive and important means of persuasion. And long experience of the inefficacy of merely intellectual conviction, ought to teach us that man—depraved, fallen, miserable man—can never be gained over to salvation, unless he be directed from the first to the main point—a subjection of the understanding and passions to the divine will. And, indeed, the honour of God demands this course. Are we to conceal his Revelation, and to take up such parts of it as we may choose? Can we expect his grace and blessing, if we have not humility and moral courage to avow our need of them? Will the grace of the Divine Spirit rest upon our arguments, if we do not place in a prominent light our constant dependence on his aid? Will the blessed Saviour own the books which pass over his great redemption?

But the mercy of God is leading men now to that union of the historical and internal proofs which never ought to have been interrupted. Men are now selecting from the various schools of Christian apologists what is solid and useful, and presenting them in a popular form for the instruction of mankind. The personal piety of the primitive school,—the classical illustrations of the literary,—the deep reverence for Scripture in the theological,—the sound reasonings of the metaphysical,—and the plain matters of fact of the historical class of writers on evidence, being judiciously employed by the truly Christian advocate, the consciences of men will be more closely addressed than ever, the question of the truth of Christianity will be presented in its native force, the heart will be appealed to and engaged in the service of God, the first entrance of sceptical objections will be prevented by sound

principles well fixed in the mind. God will be honoured in the evidences, as much as he is in the doctrines and obedience of the gospel ; and indeed the foundation both of doctrine and obedience will be laid in a well-settled conviction of the truth of the Christian Revelation.

What a prospect, then, does this present to the eye which would view the whole mighty tide of evidence ! How wide and deep does it flow ! How disembarassed from material impediments ! How bright are the hopes of the future happiness of mankind ! Every thing seems ready in the frame-work of Christianity ; in the state of the Christian argument ; in the condition of the world ; in the progress of the accumulating evidences ; for the breaking forth of the river of life from its present narrow channel, and its fertilizing the whole earth.

It is to contribute, in some feeble measure, to this result, that the author has ventured on the hazardous attempt which is now bringing to a close. Thirty or forty years of attention to the subject, have convinced him of the importance, in a day like the present, of stating the Christian evidences, not in a way of intellectual conviction merely, but of practical impression upon the heart.

This he has attempted, anxious to open a way for others to prosecute the inquiry in its best manner—a manner which unites the honour of God and a dependence upon his grace, with an appeal to the understanding and conscience of mankind.

May the author be permitted to address, in conclusion,

I. THE RULERS AND GOVERNORS OF HIS BELOVED COUNTRY, and to urge upon them the duty of examining thoroughly the question of Christianity, and

acting courageously in their public and private capacity, as becomes sincere believers in that Revelation?

Never did our country occupy so exalted a position in the eye of mankind, as at the present moment: and yet never was there a crisis when the faith of Christianity was more essential to the permanence of our prosperity. The spirit of universal inquiry, of intellectual effort, which is now pushing itself forward on all hands, can only be safely directed by the manly and national avowal of our adherence to the Christian faith.¹ Revelation teaches kings and legislators that a secret Providence orders the affairs of nations—that success is in a divine hand—that defeat and discontent and division and anarchy, are the ordinary inflictions which the Almighty permits, for the punishment of a wicked people. To espouse Christianity, then, is to give at once a right direction to a spirit of investigation, and to ensure the blessing of God upon our national counsels.

Let the legislator consider the picture of a Christian nation when fully acting up to its principles;² and let him remember that every vice discouraged, every national act of piety promoted, every statute passed in favour of moral and religious order, is so much gained to the permanent glory of our country. Nor should the most exalted personages forget that Christianity reveals such obligations, imposes such duties, calls for such exertions, that no rank is exempt from the full measure of responsibility. Nay, the higher the station, the deeper is the accountableness, because the more widely is the mischief of a bad example diffused, and the more numerous the victims seduced into sin and irreligion.

And what can be the cement of national virtue, subjection to the laws, mutual love, activity in every generous enterprise, but Christianity; which implant-

¹ Bishop Blomfield.

² Lecture XVIII. on the Tendency of Christianity.

ing the one new and grand principle of LOVE TO GOD, and BENEVOLENCE to man, contains in itself the seeds of all improvement, the chain of universal union and peace, the spring of every mild and generous disposition? Yes, Christianity is the grand remedy for the evils of mankind, whether in their social or personal capacity. It precisely checks and goes to extinguish that principle of debased selfishness, which is the ruin of states, and to cherish that true public spirit which is the parent of all virtuous effort; whilst it unites man with God, elevates him to the highest efforts of which his nature is capable, and prepares him for eternity.

But let the GREAT remember, further, that it is not only in their official capacities that they must vindicate the cause of Christianity, but in their domestic and private conduct. If Revelation is to govern our population, it will be very much by means of the upright, pure, and consistent example proposed by those of distinction and influence to the mass of the nation. The personal virtue, the marked attention to religious duties, the constant observation of the Lord's day, the honour put upon the name of the Almighty, upon his word and ministers; the right use of influence, the conscientious disposal of patronage; the employment of wealth to the noblest purposes; the education and instruction of the poor: these are amongst the duties which Christianity imposes upon the great and honourable. To lead forward their countrymen in designs of benevolence, to marshal them in purposes of charity, in the diffusion of the Scriptures over the world, and in the dissemination of missions; these are becoming acts of the Christian noble and statesman.

And for all these ends, let them imbibe the peculiar grace and influence of the Christianity which they profess. Let them not be Christians by halves. The fallen heart of man, the power of the cross of the Saviour Jesus Christ, the operations of the Holy

Spirit in renewing the whole soul, the life of faith and love, the necessity of communion with God, separation from the vanities of the world, and devout preparation for eternity; these are the peculiarities of Christianity, from which alone, as from a root fixed in a fertile soil, can the abundant fruits of a Christian life be produced.

Christianity is every thing or nothing. If it be true, it is true in all its parts, in all its discoveries, in all its consequences. And none are more solemnly called on to imbibe its very inmost principles, than those who, from their elevated rank and the flatteries and follies which usually surround them, are most exposed to a worldly and inefficient profession of that holy faith.

II. But may the author venture to turn himself to his REVEREND BRETHREN AND FATHERS IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH of every profession, but especially of his own beloved Protestant apostolical ENGLISH CHURCH?

On them will rest, after all, the great burden of instructing mankind and carrying out the evidences of Christianity into their holy efficacy upon the heart and life. They are the appointed stewards, messengers, ambassadors of the King of kings. They represent their Saviour in the world; they preach his doctrines; they administer his sacraments; they apply his promises; they give warning of the solemn consequences of disobedience. Christianity is interpreted by their life, propagated by their labours, estimated by their spirit. They create the practical standard, the tone, the general notion of what religion demands of man. And what but the decline from the purity of the gospel, in doctrine and practice, amongst us, has been the occasion of the lamentable state of things in Christendom? Revered brethren, I take a full share myself in this guilt. It is the ministry

secularized, dishonoured, sunk down into tame and worldly generalities, which has opened the flood-gates of infidelity upon Europe. Men have known little of real, vital, scriptural Christianity. They have taken up their opinions from the defective, and erroneous, though, perhaps, fashionable doctrines of the day; and from the vain, speculative, indulgent, worldly lives of the ministers of Christianity. Thank God for that renewed sense of duty and responsibility which is visiting Europe, and which appears in our return to the pure truth of the Bible in our doctrines and lives, in our zeal for propagating the gospel abroad, and in our active and humble discharge of the pastoral duties at home.

Let me be allowed to offer two or three suggestions. We are ever in danger of MISTAKING TALENT, effort, exertion, for evangelical doctrine and the mighty operations of grace; we are in danger of leaning to literary taste, acuteness of intellect, secular eloquence, a spirit of partizanship, the discovery and undue elevation of novelties. Let a humble, holy, pure exhibition of the gospel be our constant aim. The full, simple, unaffected preaching of Christ crucified, in all the amplitude of its doctrines, and all the sweetness and loveliness of its practical fruits—this is Christianity. The Son and Spirit of God are the peculiarities of Revelation, and they must be the peculiarities of our ministry; and this in the same spirit of humility, humble dependence upon God for a blessing, and ascription of every thing to him, which we see in the inspired epistles. In short, the Bible expounded and applied; Revelation in its own words and its native simplicity; truth as it came down from the Father of lights, and is consigned in the books we have been defending; the holy Scriptures expounded to the heart by the Holy Spirit by whom they were indited—this is the Christian ministry. What has human reasoning ever done? How powerless is reason in

her speculations even in matters relating to this world! What has ever been discovered or effected by hypothesis and theory? No inventions in medicine, or any other practical science, have been the result of abstract notions and reasonings. Modest and diligent observation has alone arranged the great and solid acquisitions of science. Christianity, once acknowledged as divine, is our grand experiment; from it we proceed as from first principles; thence we derive our elements of reasoning, our means of instruction, our grounds of hope, our confidence of strength and success. For the minister to keep close to the Bible, is the same as for the philosopher to keep close to nature, and the statesman to the records of experience.

But with this let us join all that **EXPANSIVE CHARITY** which, in this imperfect world, is so essential to any united efforts for the glory of our Saviour. Truth is not fully, and in all its parts, revealed; the degree of divine illumination differs in each Christian minister; the measures of attainment, both as to knowledge and holiness, are widely and almost indefinitely varied; the force of reasoning from premises, and the faculty of following out consequences from them, exist in very distinct degrees; the calmness and deliberation of the mind, in coming to conclusions are widely different; whilst Satan's great aim is to divide and estrange Christians from each other. What causes are these for forbearance! How large a part of our state of probation here consists in bearing with each other; in forgiving, counselling, aiding, strengthening one the other! In all main points we agree. The simplicity of the leading truths of Scripture, received by the teaching of the Holy Spirit and expounded by a well-regulated conscience, create a substantial unity in all true Christians. Dwell on these capital points. Let others have no more than their proportionate weight. Follow each your own best convictions; but do not agitate and rend the church. Keep closely

together. Let us spend our strength on better matters than controversy. Let us exhibit to our people an united front ; let us infuse an harmonious spirit ; let us follow the evidences of our faith, as they are gathered from books, with the evidences which are apparent in the temper and-deducible from a Christian conduct. Let each of us fill up, in the best manner we are able, our several platforms of discipline, in a spirit of consistency, indeed, but of charity ; and leave the hope of agreeing formally on all points, till we reach the world of full revelation and unclouded light and glory.

To the simple preaching of the gospel, and the loveliness of real charity, let us add **DILIGENCE AND COMPASSION IN THE PASTORAL DUTIES**, and we shall discharge our main obligation as ministers of religion. Where should the shepherd be but with his flock ? What avail public instructions, if the detail be not filled up in private ? Where is the Christianity we profess, if it be exhausted in a few formal and brief exhibitions, and do not descend into the daily life ? How little do the body of our people understand of our elaborate compositions, unless, by catechetical instructions, by private expositions, by application of truth to the individual conscience, we make them intelligible ? What has a minister of religion to do with literary trifling, with worldly visits, with light reading, with frivolous avocations, which unfit him for serious study, render the Bible distasteful, and indispose him for the private care of souls. Let us only so carry our Christianity into practice, as to add these pastoral duties to our other engagements as ministers, and we may hope for a large measure of the divine grace to descend upon us.

May I suggest also the expediency of **PAYING MORE REGARD THAN HAS BEEN USUALLY DONE TO THE SUBJECT OF THE EVIDENCES**, which we have been discussing in this work ? Can we hope to pre-

serve our people in the faith, unless we teach them the grounds of that faith? Can we expect them to pass unhurt through the hosts of enemies, if we give them no shield to protect their breasts? Why do our population so soon fall away from Christianity; but because conscience was never fairly informed of the grounds of belief? Let us, then, instruct them in the foundations of Christianity; and let us unite, in doing so, the internal with the external evidences; let us make the historical the introduction to the inward proofs. Thus may we hope that our youth, well-established in their faith, tenderly watched over by their pastors, inflamed with a spirit of charity, and growing more and more in the knowledge and obedience of the peculiarities of Revelation, will be a seed to serve our God, and hand down to the next age the truth which we deliver to them in this.

III. TO THE HUMBLE AND TEACHABLE, AND ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG amongst his readers, let the author be, finally, allowed to address himself.

I have in these Lectures been endeavouring to urge on you the importance of cordially obeying the Christian Revelation. Let me affectionately intreat you to enter into the great subject. Let it penetrate your soul. Let its authority entrench itself in your understanding, and its holy and elevated truths in your inmost conscience and heart. Turn a deaf ear to the voice of scorn, and the temptations of sensuality. Remember, nothing is more easy than to inject doubts into the fallen heart of man, which it may take much argument to eradicate; just as it is easy to kindle, by a single spark, a conflagration, which it may take infinite labour to extinguish, and much time and expense to repair. My aim has been to furnish you with a protection against the mazes and artifices of infidels, by exposing the miserable sophistry of their reasoning, and the awful vices of their conduct.

Keep close, then, to the Christian faith. Refresh your memory, from time to time, with a review of its chief evidences. If any violent temptation assault you, meet the shock by falling back, first on the practical holiness of Christianity, and then on the general mass of proofs of every kind, by which your faith is sustained. Act as one who was told that his house was falling; that the arches on which it was reared were giving way; and that his continuance in it was perilous: ask, 'Who is it tells me this; what grounds have I for crediting his information; how does his own house stand; what are his own foundations?' If you find every thing about him in ruins; you need not much perplex yourself with alarms which proceed from folly or ignorance. However, you may examine once again. Descend to the basements of your abode; search if there are any marks of decay. You are surprised at the strength of the arches; you observe no giving way, no one sign of weakness: rather, every part seems to have settled by time into a firmer and more compact state. Resume, then, your tranquillity, and employ the blessing of a secure abode to its proper uses. Thus will every renewed examination confirm your faith in the Christian Revelation.

But remember that, in order to this, you must continue in a practical and heartfelt obedience to the blessed Saviour who is the centre of divine truth; in whose doctrine, example, grace, all Christianity is comprised: and who with the Spirit of God is the divine agent in redemption. So will you have the witness in yourself. If you use Revelation, the evidence will break in upon your mind more and more; if you are not using it, nothing can render it clear: objections will arise, as noxious vapours, from a stagnant mass of notions and prejudices in your mind. God keeps things in his own hand. Truth, to be strongly seized, and fully understood, must be obeyed, loved, carried out into practice.

And be assured, that the highest effort of the human intellect, is to bow to the divine ; the noblest exercise of the human powers, is to glorify God, and aspire after his favour ; the truest liberty of man is a subjection to his all-perfect Creator and Lord ; the only genuine source of human happiness, is the acquiescence of our will in the will of God.

All other advice is poison ; all other means of elevation or happiness, are the swellings of disease, and the perverse dictates of a rebellious nature.

Man's probation consists in this one point ; Will he humble his reason before God's all-comprehending knowledge, and his heart and affections before God's all-holy and perfect commands ?

Christianity is the highest reason ; the purest morals ; the only sound philosophy ; the truest happiness of man.

All the discoveries in science illustrate the divine glory in creation ; as all the researches of history, and all the testimony of experience, display the divine grace in Revelation. Each new discovery adds something to the impression, though little to the obligation under which we lie to obey and love God ; for this obligation is so deep—rests on so firm a foundation—extends to so many points, and converges into so bright and luminous a centre, as to be little affected by a single argument, more or less clearly stated, or adequately perceived.

Soon will truth shine out without a cloud ; soon will the folly of unbelief, and the wisdom of faith, be seen in other proportions than at present ; soon will the moral obligation of obedience to such a Revelation as Christianity, and the unutterable guilt of rejecting it, appear in their just characters ; soon will all the passing objections and cavils of men be dispersed as the early dew ; soon will the day of probation be terminated for ever ; this world, and all its occupations fade away ; and an end be imposed on the present scene of things. Yes, “ the day of the Lord will come

as a thief in the night ; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth, also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.”¹

Then SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER.”²

It is with the purpose of preparing your inquiring minds for this sublime and awful consummation, that I have addressed you in these Lectures ; which, undertaken with great apprehension and self-distrust, I would desire to lay, as an offering, on the altar of the Christian faith, humbly beseeching the God of all mercy to pardon the defects of the writer, and to bless and prosper what there is of truth in his statements and representations ; and imploring that both author and readers may “ find mercy of the Lord in THAT DAY.”³

And now, after the example of my most revered predecessors in this argument, I would desire to conclude this my attempt, not in words merely, but from the sentiment of my heart, with that ascription of praise which the illuminating Spirit has himself left for our use :—

Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ φυλάξαι αὐτοὺς ἀπταιστούς,
καὶ στηῆσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἀμώ-
μον ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει,

ΜΟΝΩ ΣΟΦΩ ΘΕΩ

σωτῆρι ἡμῶν, δόξα καὶ μεγαλὸς ὕμνος, κράτος
καὶ ἐξουσία καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶ-
νας. Ἀμήν.

ΙΟΥΔΑ, 24, 25.

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 10—12. ² Matt. xiii. 43. ³ 2 Tim. i. 16.

INDEX TO THE WHOLE WORK.

Adaptation of Christianity to man. See *Suitableness*.

Address to the docile and sincere student, i. 176. *Ruler, and governors*, ii, 422. *Ministers of Christ's church*, 615. *The humble and teachable*, 429.

Advantages, which each individual has respectively enjoyed in a Christian land, unspeakably augment the obligation to receive Christianity, ii. 381.

Alaric, soldiers under, a wonderful example of the power of Christianity over the fierce passions of man, i. 297.

Apocryphal books of Old Testament, i. note, 144.

Apocryphal books of New Testament are destitute of the external proofs of authenticity which belong to the Canonical books, i. 103.

Apostles, the, of our Lord, were twelve separate witnesses to the gospel facts, i. 136; had a full knowledge of the things they attested, 136; were competent judges of the facts to which they bore testimony, 137; were of transparent integrity of character, 138; men of sound minds, and by no means credulous, 139; relate events at the spot where they occurred, and before the multitudes who witnessed them, 139; their subsequent lives were distinguished by unparalleled benevolence and holiness, 140; and they had nothing to expect for their testimony but temporal calamities and death, 140. *Gifts* bestowed upon them by our Lord, 327.

Apparent contradictions, in man, accounted for by the Christian Revelation, ii. 17.

Authenticity of writings defined, note i. 70; discovered by their contents, 80.

Authenticity of the Old Testament, connected with that of the New, i. 66. 142.

Authenticity of the books of the New Testament stands on the authority of apostle Paul, i. 68; illustrated by that of the Book of Common Prayer, 70; Doomsday Book, 71; Institutes of Justinian, 71; Ancient Classics, 72; Manifest from their contents, 82; and, by analogy, from the conduct of men respecting legal deeds, 83. The proofs of which we possess, are irradiations of the divine glory, 85; and demand our sincere confidence, 86. They consist of the testimony of witnesses, in succession, from the present day up to the time of the apostles, 89; a specimen of their testimony, 94; of the progressive settlement of the sacred canon, 91; the admissions of Heathen and Jewish adversaries, 98; the number and antiquity of our manuscripts, 101; the style and manner of the books, 104; unexpected confirmations, 108.

Babylon, destruction, of, i. 240.

Bacon's, Lord, remark on first flowings of Scripture, i. 363, on the office of reason, ii. 312; on interpretation of Scriptures, note, 355.

Beneficial effects of Christianity. See *Effects of Christianity*.

Benevolence and compassion of Jesus Christ, ii. 101.

Benevolence, the cement of national virtue, ii. 424.

Boyle, the Honourable Robert, the character and conduct of, ii. 264.

Canaanites, the history of, shows the fulfilment of prophecy concerning them, i. 243.

Candid and sincere mind, all is light in Christianity to the, i. 377.

Canon of Scripture, the progressive settlement of, i. 91.

Cecil's Remains cited, i. 149.

Celsus, the Heathen philosopher, admits the genuineness of the New Testament, i. 98.

CHRIST must be received into the heart, as well as the miracles he wrought be believed, i. 178. The character and conduct of our Lord Jesus, ii. 86; his claims, 87; his conduct as MEDIATOR, 90; the SON OF GOD, and the SAVIOUR of the world, 90; a teacher and revealer of the will of God, as to his manner, dignified and forcible, 92; yet mild and attractive, 93; as to his matter, grand, and yet intelligible, 94; earnest, and yet wise, 94; in a state of humiliation, 96; promising to his disciples a heavenly reward, 98.

As a PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL, an example of human virtue, 100 ; piety and devotion to his heavenly Father, 100 ; benevolence and compassion towards man, 101 ; meekness and lowliness of spirit, 103 ; superiority to the world, 103 ; strict temperance, and command of the inferior appetites, 104 ; fortitude and constancy, 104 ; prudence and discretion, 105 ; all these unalloyed with the kindred failings, 106 ; opposite graces in equal proportion, 106 ; carried to the utmost height, and continued in one even tenor, 107 ; with a peculiar harmony, 108. As THE FOUNDER of the Christian religion, 108 ; his suitableness to the necessities of man, 108 ; the surprising novelty and sublimity of his deportment, 110 ; the different parts of his character correspond with his undertaking, 111 ; the impression and effect of his whole public character, 113 ; the manner in which it is given by the evangelists, 113. The argument in favour of Christianity, springs from a fair presumption upon the first statement of the case, 116 ; rises higher when contrasted with every other pretension, 116 ; becomes a moral demonstration, 119 ; and bears away the heart of every serious inquirer, 121.

Christian, the true, feels the necessity of Revelation, i. 63.

Christians should take care that the good effects of Christianity be the result of religious principles in themselves, i. 309 ; must not stop short in its temporal benefits, 309 ; and will find its advantages in proportion to the development of its strength and energy, 311. Young Christians should continue in the things they have been assured of, 342.

Christian nations, the state of, shows that Revelation was necessary, i. 57 ; viewed in the sixteenth century, 57 ; at any period, 57 ; at the present day, 57. The advantages they possess, 63.

Christian Revelation speaks a decisive language, ii. 9 ; unfolds all the mysteries of man's condition, 13 ; accounts for the apparent contradictions of his state, 17 ; and addresses him on this footing, 17. Provides also a remedy for all his wants, 17 ; and is calculated for universal diffusion, 23.

Christianity courts inquiry, i. 1 ; is not a speculation, 20 ; requires her students to be of a meek and docile disposition, 23. The only religion set up and established by miracles, 174. Effects of, 289. Admission of the inspiration of the Scripture essential to the right reception of Christianity, 356. Conspires at no one vice, ii. 37. The sum of, Jesus Christ, 122 ; supposed to be universal, 153. What it is, and what it is not, 155. Directions for making a

personal trial of it, 192. Is so excellent in itself that the slightest external evidence is sufficient to oblige men to obey it, ii. 369.

Clement, Bishop of Rome, A. D. 91 to 110, testimony of, to the authenticity of books of New Testament, i. 94; to the inspiration, 340.

Coins, ancient, *see* *Medals*.

Common sense, it is an act of, to follow the proofs of Christianity, i. 372. Common sense and the ordinary laws of human language assist us to the right method of interpretation, ii. 357.

Compass, the Bible is the Christian's, i. 149.

Confirmations to the authenticity of the New Testament unexpected, i. 108. A remarkable fragment discovered in 1740, 110.

Consolatory, the Christian doctrines are, ii. 50.

Constantine's, the Emperor, attachment to sacred Scriptures i. 97.

Contradictions of Infidelity and Paganism, ii. 46.

Converts. Men of the finest talents convinced by the Christian history, i. 132. The moral and religious change wrought in the Christian, 274. Included persons of all ranks, 275.

Conviction of the truth of Christianity is strengthened the more practically its propagation is considered, i. 287.

Credibility of the Old Testament, i. 142.

Credibility of the New Testament defined, i. 119; illustrated, 120; established by the authenticity of the books, 121; by the extraordinary prominence and small number of the principal facts, 122; by the positive and various testimonies adduced, 123; by the testimony of the governors of Roman provinces, 125; Heathen writers, 125; Jewish historians, 127; by the conviction produced in the minds of men of the finest talents, who, examining the pretensions of Christianity, met its claims at first with prejudice and hatred, 132; by silence of Mahomet, 132; by existing rites and usages, which sprang out of the facts of Christianity, 132; by ancient and authentic monuments, coins, and medals, 133; by the character and circumstances of the sacred writers themselves, 135; fifteen witnesses, 136; possessing a full knowledge of the things they attested, 136; and of which they were competent judges, 137; being persons of the strictest integrity, 138; of sound minds, and by no means credulous, 139; relating events at the spot where they occurred, and before the multitudes who witnessed them, 139; their sub-

sequent lives marked by unparalleled benevolence and holiness, 140; while they had nothing to expect for their testimony but temporal calamities and death, 140; no one came forward to complain of an imposition, 141; if our accounts be false, where is the true one, 142.

Depravity of the human heart the greatest obstacle to the full reception of Christianity, i. 375.

Direction, the, which Christianity takes, ii. 128.

Directions for entering on a personal trial of Christianity as a matter of experience, ii. 188; study Christianity in the Bible itself, 192; trace out in your heart and character the truth of the particular statements of the Bible, as to the condition of man and his guilt before God, 196; pray fervently for divine grace, 200; use the means which God has promised to bless, 203; keep your eye fixed on the great object which Christianity reveals, 205; observe how all the parts of it constitute a whole, and meet all the necessities of your case, 207.

DIVINE AUTHORITY of Christianity established by miracles, i. 150; prophecy, 180, 186; its propagation, 258; preservation, 28; beneficial effects, 289; adaptation, ii. 1; doctrines, 32; morals, 59; example of Christ, 86; and tendency, 124.

Docile hearers, address to, ii. 121, 429.

Docility necessary in a student of Christianity, i. 24, 202, 256; essential to a sound interpretation of Scripture, ii. 332, 360, 362.

Doctrines of Christianity, definition of, ii. 32; enumeration of the chief doctrines 33; their divine excellency pointed out, 42; they all emanate from the character of God, 42; possess simplicity, 43; surpassing grandeur and sublimity, 44; and an harmony which stamps their divine authority, 45; meet all the necessities of man, 48; and yet promote the ends of God's moral government, 48; are deeply humiliating, 50; and yet sources of consolation, 51; they are the result of the great design of Almighty God, 53; augment the inward evidence of Christianity, 57; and demand of the true Christian, love and gratitude to God, 58.

Doddridge and Rousseau, contrasted, ii. 269.

Effects of Christianity a proof of its divine authority, i. 289; Christianity implants good principles, 290; arouses conscience, 290; discourages vices, and establishes contrary

virtues, 291; mitigates insatiable ardour after worldly possessions, 291; implants enlarged benevolence, 291; expels indolence, 291; and elevates the whole character of man, 291. Christianity banishes an immense mass of evils—idolatry, 291; murder, 292; exposing of infants, 293; divorce and polygamy, 293;—the degradation of the female sex, 294; the cruelties of domestic slavery, 294; private assassination, 295; and a thousand similar evils, 295; Christianity mitigates many other evils—such as the horrors of war, 297; the spirit of faction and party-animosities in states, 299; venality and corruption, 299; offences against temperance and chastity, 299; and raises the standard of public opinion as to morals and religion, 300. Christianity has conferred, and is conferring, numerous substantial benefits on individuals and nations; it has elevated the female sex, 301; blessed the lower orders of society, 301; instituted charitable designs for the relief of human wretchedness, 302; encircled age with reverence, 303; given man a day of rest, 303; has infused into Christian legislators and princes the temper of equity and mercy, 303; conferred the blessing of equal distributive justice, 304; extends its salutary influence to distant provinces, 304; and civilizes states, 305.

Effects, the ultimate, which Christianity will produce when all obstacles are removed, ii. 143.

Egyptians, present state of, confirms ancient prophecies, i. 242.

Eusebius, quotation from, respecting the propagation of Christianity, i. 269.

Evidences of Christianity, not to be continually dwelt upon, i. 9; but occasionally, 10; and not in a way of testimony merely, 10; but in a practical manner, 10; as in the early centuries, leading men on to the inward excellencies of the religion itself, 11. They demand attention at the present time on account of the young, 11; the lapse of time since Christianity took its rise, 12; the decayed state of piety, 13; a spurious philosophy spread far and wide, 13; the neglect of the Christian religion, 14; and the daring assaults of scepticism, 15. They are forcible, 15; and may be now considered with facility, from the diffusion of education, 16; progress in the study of the law of evidence, 16; the avowed necessity of following nature, 16; and the revival of primitive piety and zeal, 16. Their importance, 20, 21; their accumulation, 285. Their simplicity, variety, independence, and force of, increase man's obligation, ii. 373. They have arisen in an incidental manner, ii. 412. The actual mass at the present time, 416.

Evidences, external and internal, compared, and their respective places and merit determined, ii. 3. The topics of the internal, stated, 4.

Evidences, external, recapitulation of, i. 365.

Evidences, internal, the nature of the argument arising from, ii. 396; recapitulation of the details of, 398; correspond with the probationary and imperfect state of man, 401; are to be collected together, 402

Example of his disciples, Christ the, ii. 100.

Facts now admitted assist the consideration of the question of evidences, ii. 419

Faith, should practically correspond with what we admit in argument respecting Christianity, i. 146.

Faith, definition of, ii. 300; the principle by which human society is moved, 300; definition and illustration of faith in a divine Revelation, 300; distinction between faith exercised on human testimony and on divine, 302; difference between a living and dead, 303; the corruption of man forms the great difficulty in exercising faith on divine testimony, 304; for man hesitates to exercise faith in Christianity, although God is the author of the Revelation, 304; it regards man's supreme interests, 305; and comes, to him in the moment of danger, 305; the scriptural account of, 306; prayer for, 307; the reasonableness of, after admitting the divine authority of Christianity, 307; both as to the discoveries of the Christian religion, 308; and as to the necessity of divine aid, 312; the extent of, 314; embracing every part of Revelation, 315; assigning to each the relative importance which it finds ascribed in Scripture, 317; but stopping where Revelation stops, 318; and following, as much as possible, the language as well as the sentiments, of Scripture, 320; produces tranquillity, 321; and is the principle of the Christian life, 323; must be vital and influential, 325; is obtained in answer to prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit, 326; and is calculated to produce humility of mind, 328; implies an honest application of our natural understanding to the Scriptures, 331; includes a willingness to submit it, together with, our heart, to all the truths which God has been pleased to reveal, 332; puts us in possession of many of the blessings of which the Scriptures treat, 333; leads the Christian to seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit, 335; guards him against the danger of hazardous interpretations, or false use of difficult passages, 335; disposes him to resort to all the necessary helps in order to

obtain a sound interpretation of Scripture, 336. Historical, will only increase condemnation, 212. A sound interpretation of Scripture springs directly from a true, 331.

Forgeries, the books of the New Testament cannot be, i. 76.

Fortitude and constancy of our Lord, ii. 104.

Gustrel, Bishop, quotation from, on the harmony of the Christian doctrines, ii. 48.

Gibbon's pride and presumption at the approach of death, ii. 282

God, the being, perfections, and providence of the one living and true, ii. 33; the doctrines emanate from the character of, 42.

Grace of God is now turning the minds of men to the most effective statement of the whole argument, ii. 420.

Grandeur and sublimity of the Christian doctrines, ii. 44

Harmony of the Christian doctrines, ii. 45

Heathen world, before the coming of Christ, had lost the doctrine of the being of God, i. 44; they had no standard of morals, 45; no moral teaching, 45; they were impure and abominable even in their religion, 46; their depravity, both as to knowledge and practice, deep and universal, 47; and they had no principle of reformation, 49; the wisest heathens confessed their despair, 62

Heathen countries of the present day, the state of, prove to us that unassisted reason cannot enlighten and sanctify mankind, i. 54; the moral and religious state of India, 54, Western or Southern Africa, 56; America and China, 56; an uniformity in their vices, 56; their miserable condition should awaken our sympathy, 63

Heathen writers admit the facts of the gospel history, i. 125

Heavenly reward promised by our Lord to his disciples, ii. 98

Hindrances which impede the full effects of the Christian religion, ii. 132; foretold by Christianity, 142.

HOLY SPIRIT, the personality and operation of, ii. 37.

Hooker's last words, ii. 283.

Hope, the Christian's defined, i. 1; the reason of it as given by Christians of the first century 2; of the second and third century, 3; of the ninth, tenth, or twelfth century, 4; of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, 5; to be always given with meekness and fear; 7, 21.

- Horsley, Bishop*, on the inspiration of the New Testament, i. note, 330.
- Humble and teachable* minds admit spontaneously the inspiration of the Scriptures, i. 363.
- Hume's death-bed*, ii. 283.
- Humiliating*, the Christian doctrines are, ii. 50.
- Humiliation* of our Lord, ii. 96.
- Japheth*, the present state of the descendants of, agrees with the prophecy concerning them, i. 244.
- Jerome, St.* testimony of, to the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, i. 96.
- Jews*, the dispersion of, i. 234; a standing miracle, 238.
- Ignatius*, Bishop of Antioch, A. D. 70, testimony of, to the authenticity of books of New Testament, i. 95. Martyrdom, ii. 286.
- Impostor*, an, could not have invented the facts of the New Testament, i. 158.
- Infidelity* blots out all Revelation, i. 62; attempts to oppose reason to faith, ii. 308.
- Infidels*, the wretched systems of, ii. 82; horrify the sincere inquirer after morality, 83. The admissions of, respecting the character of our Lord, 120. Lives and deaths of, compared with those of sincere Christians, 255; as to the maintenance of the principles of morals and religion held by them in common, 256; their respective discharge of the duties of domestic and social life, 260; their benevolence and goodwill towards men, 266; their public labours and the writings they have submitted to the eye of mankind, 271; their deaths, 279; and preparation for an eternal state of being, 279. Every one should examine with which company he is walking in the journey of life, 296. See *Unbelievers*.
- Inspiration* of the Holy Scriptures most important, i. 315; that of the Old Testament asserted by our Lord and his apostles, 317; that of the New Testament inferred from that of the Old, 317; confirmed by the promise made by our Lord, and by the gifts received in consequence, 324; claimed by the apostles themselves, 333; and attested by the early Christian church, 338; the wonderful method of the divine agency in the inspiration of Scriptures, 346; the extent of inspiration, 350; and the advantages which we derive from both, 355; the admission of it essential to the right reception of Christianity, 358; tends to shut out the most per-

nicious evils, 360 ; and is the spontaneous dictate of the humble and teachable, 363.

Interests, the immense, at stake, carries the obligations of Christianity to an inconceivable height, ii. 387.

Interpretation, the sound, of Scripture, ii. 330 ; springs directly from a true faith, which implies an honest application of our natural understanding to the Scriptures, 331 ; includes a willingness to submit our understanding and heart to all the truths which God is pleased to reveal, 332 ; puts us into possession of many of the blessings of which the Scriptures treat, 333 ; leads the Christian to seek the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, 335 ; guards him against the danger of hazardous interpretations, or a false use of difficult passages, 335 ; disposes him to resort to all necessary helps, 336 ; common sense, and the ordinary laws of human language, suggest that the simplest sense is, generally, the true one, 337 ; the occasion of the books being written should be consulted, 339 ; brief passages explained by those which are more full, 340 ; figurative and poetical parts interpreted by their appropriate laws, 341 ; we should suspend our judgment where a passage is, after all, not obvious, 343 ; the scope and analogy of truth will either solve all material difficulties, or render them practically useful, 344. The inspiration which belongs to the Bible, requires us, in interpreting its contents, to rise to the sublimity of the Scripture mysteries, 345 ; to give to the last portion of Revelation that weight which it may justly claim, 346 ; to discover the lustre of what is permanent and uniform, amidst all that is temporary, local, and extraordinary, 347 ; to distinguish between vital Christianity and what is merely nominal adherence to its external ordinances, 349 ; to derive from Scripture the use, place, and bearings of truth, as well as the truth itself, 350 ; not to force the simple meaning of Scripture, either to express or exclude mysteries, according to our turn of mind, 352 ; and not to reduce divine truths to a human system, 354. The diversity of interpretations has been greatly exaggerated, 356 ; is not chargeable on Christianity, 357 ; falls chiefly on subordinate matters, 358 ; the evils may be avoided in practice, 358 ; the universal church has presented but one front of truth to mankind, 358 ; Vital Christianity in the heart can alone interpret aright, 359.

Josephus, testimony of, to the facts of Christianity, i. 127.

Irenæus, testimony to the inspiration of the New Testament, i. 340.

Ishmael, the present state of the descendants of, agrees with the prophecy concerning them, i. 242.

Julian, the apostate, allows the facts of Christianity, and admits the gospels as the works of the apostles, i. 93.

Justification by faith only is the leading truth of the whole gospel, ii. 37, 50.

Justin Martyr, testimony of, to the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, i. 95 ; to the inspiration, 340.

Koran of Mahomet condemned by its contents, i. 80.

Lardner, Dr., quotation from, as to the number of quotations from Scripture in the works of Irenæus, i. 92.

Latimer's last words, ii. 286.

Lectures, order of, i. 18.

Life, the Christian's holy, best defence of Christianity, i. 21.

Love of Christ constrains, ii. 74.

Love of Christians to the Bible, attested by Pamphilus, i. 97 ; Valens, 97 ; Constantine, 98 ; has furnished us with the proofs of its authenticity, 116. Exhortation to the duty, 117.

Mahometanism, propagation of, i. 276.

Mahomet, does not venture to question the facts of Christianity, i. 132 ; apostacy of, 246.

Man, every, lies under an obligation to obey the divine Revelation. See *Obligation*.

Man's guilt and condemnation as a transgressor against God, ii. 35.

Manner in which the evangelists give the character of our Lord, ii. 113.

Manuscripts of the New Testament, the number and antiquity of, i. 101.

Medals, by their inscriptions, attest the credibility of the gospel history, i. 133.

Meditations supposed to be made by one who has made a trial of the blessings of Christianity, ii. 208.

Meekness and lowliness of spirit of our Lord, ii. 103.

Men of the finest talents convinced by the Christian history, i. 132, 275.

Messiah. See *CHRIST*.

Ministers of Christ's Church, address to, ii. 425 ; in danger of mistaking talents for the operations of grace, 426 ; need expansive charity, 427 ; diligence and compassion in their pastoral duties, 428 ; and should pay attention to the subject of evidences, 429.

Miracle, definition of a, i. 152. The wonderful actions ascribed to our Saviour and his apostles, and called miracles, really took place, 154. In every miracle, there are two distinct and palpable facts, 155 ; these are attested by the credibility of the books, 155 ; the converts of the first century believed them, 156 ; monuments were set up in memory of them, and continue to the present day, 157 ; the account itself, as recorded in our books, establishes them, 159. Objections against the credibility of miracles answered, 160. The wonderful actions were plain and palpable miracles, 163 ; they were done by Christ and his apostles, as divine acts, 164 ; before the Jewish nation, 165 ; consisted of numerous and various suspensions of the course of nature, 165 ; produced permanent effects, 167 ; and were wrought for a high and holy end, 168. The miracles of which our Lord was the subject, 167. Our Saviour and the apostles appealed to them in proof of their mission, 168 ; they had been predicted as the express evidence of Messiah, 169 ; they form an appropriate attestation to a divine religion, 170 ; they were performed by those who had all other signs of a divine mission, 170 ; the inference from them to the truth of Christianity is conclusive, 171 ; they are incorporated with the instructions of Christianity, 172 ; confirmed by the success of the gospel, 173. The religion of the Bible, the sole religion, set up and established by miracles, 174.

Missions, success of Christian, i. 277.

Moral government of God, the end of, promoted by the Christian doctrines, ii. 49.

Morals, Christian, level to the comprehension of man, ii. 59 ; admired by unbelievers, 59. Their extent and purity : they embrace all that is really good in the ethics of heathen sages, 61 ; form a complete code, 61 ; erect the only true standard of duty to God and man, 62 ; omit many false virtues, and insist on many real ones, 62 ; chiefly on the mild and retiring, 63 ; they require also an abstinence from the proximate causes of evil, 63 ; regard all forms of devotion as means to a higher end, 64 ; aid each other, 64 ; and go to form a particular sort of character, 65. In order to produce these, Christianity begins with the heart of man, 66 ; aims at the

formation of habits, 66 ; directs men to seek the highest attainments, whilst she encourages the weakest efforts, 67 ; keeps aloof from secular policy, 68 ; delivers her code in decisive prohibitions, 68 ; sets forth strong and affecting examples, 70 ; and refers men to the all-seeing eye of God, 71. They are connected with every part of Revelation, and especially with its peculiar doctrines, 71 ; they have the will of God as the rule, and the eternal judgment as their ultimate sanction, 77 ; they are such as makes it impossible that Christianity should be an imposture, 81.

Muratovi, a remarkable fragment discovered by, in 1740, i. 110.

Mysteries of man's state in this world unfolded in the Christian Revelation, ii. 17.

Nations, Christianity promotes the happiness of, ii. 130. 139.

Necessities of man met by the Christian doctrines, ii. 48.

Nineveh, destruction of, i. 239.

Novelty and sublimity of our Saviour's deportment, and undertaking surprising, ii. 110.

Obedience indispensable in a Christian student, i. 25.

Oberlin, the last hours of Pastor, ii. 387.

Objections against miracles answered ; the fallibility of human testimony, i. 160 ; miracles are contrary to experience, 161 ; the transmission of remote facts is weakened by the lapse of time, 162. Against the Christian religion, ii. 215 ; the best method of treating, 215 ; are inadmissible, being either speculative opinions, and thus wrong in kind, 220 ; or against the matter of Revelation, and thus wrong in object, 222 ; contradictory the one to the other, 225 ; frivolous in themselves, 231 ; and manifestly spring from the pride, 231 ; and ignorance of the human mind, 232 ; only trials of our sincerity and submission of heart to God, and confirm, rather than weaken, the Christian evidences, 243. They fix themselves in unfurnished and vain minds, 248 ; prepared by vicious indulgences, 249 ; the departure of the Spirit of God, 249 ; and the holding slightly by Christianity, 250. They are the stratagems of Satan, 251 ; and the most deadly product of the corrupt and proud reason of a fallen creature, 252. Objections to the Christian Revelation, founded on the diversity of interpretations, refuted, 356.

Obligation to obey the divine Revelation universal, ii. 363.

The necessity of enforcing this, a proof of the corruption of

man, 364. To love and obey God antecedent to Revelation, 365. Men not left to accept or reject Christianity at their option, 367. Christianity so excellent in itself, that the slightest external evidence would be sufficient to oblige men to obey it, 369. Increased by the simplicity, variety, independence, and force of the evidences, 375. Unspeakably augmented by the advantages which each individual has enjoyed, 381; the being not born in a heathen land, 381; the events of life ordered by a gracious Providence, 382; secret motions of the blessed Spirit vouchsafed, 382; advice, example, and prayers of ministers and friends, 383. The momentous discoveries made, and the immense interests at stake carry it to an inconceivable height, 385; Christianity makes new discoveries, 385; the immense love of God in the redemption of Jesus Christ, 386; the day of judgment, 387; the heavenly prize, 388; the awful contrast, 389; eternity, what is it? 390; and what protection against it? 391.

Obstacles to the rapid diffusion of Christianity surmounted, i. 266; the first teachers were feeble and unknown, 266; the time of promulgation of Christianity inauspicious, 269; and also the place, 269; these were both increased by the fiercest persecution, 272.

Origen's testimony to the inspiration of the Scriptures, i. 339.

Paine, Thomas, the life and conduct of, ii. 261; his last moments, 284.

Pamphilus' testimony of the love of Christians to the holy books, i. 97.

Pascal's demeanour on his death-bed, ii. 282.

Paul's, St., qualifications correspond with the offices he had to fulfil, i. 327.

Perpetuity of Christianity, a proof of its divine authority, i. 280.

Persecution of the first Christians, i. 272.

Piety and devotion of Jesus Christ, ii. 100.

Pliny's testimony to facts of the gospel, i. 125; to the propagation of Christianity, 262.

Polycarp, testimony of, to the authenticity of books of New Testament, i. 95.

Pontius Pilate, testimony of, to the death and resurrection of Christ, i. 125.

Porphyry, the heathen, admits the authenticity of the Christian books, i. 98.

Prayer, the necessity of, in considering the Evidences of Christianity, i. 21. 25.

Propagation of Christianity, a proof of its divine authority, i. 258; appears from the singularity of the attempt, 259; the rapidity and extent of it, 260; the nature of the doctrine thus propagated, 265; the obstacles surmounted, 266; the change wrought in the converts, 274. Compared with that of Mahometanism, 276; with the success of our Christian missions amongst Jews and Heathen, 277; and with reforms in Christian countries, 279. The propagation of Christianity is fulfilment of prophecy, 283.

Prophecy, definition of, i. 183; its extent, 185; harmony of all its parts in the person of the Saviour, 187; the infinite wisdom apparent in the contrivance of them, 189; the double sense of prophecy, 192; the practical and important ends which prophecy subserves, 197, 224; it has the impress of the majesty of God, 191; fulfilment of it, 207, 226.

Prophecy, fulfilment of, in the person of our Lord, i. 208; as to the time, place, &c. of his birth, 209; his life, sufferings, death and resurrection, 209; his miracles and doctrine, 210; uniting qualities and attributes the most contradictory, 211; and as to his spiritual offices, 212. Circumstances connected with the fulfilment increase the proof of divine foreknowledge, 215. Prophecy of the destruction of the city and polity of the Jews, and their dispersion fulfilled, 227; others which relate to various cities, nations, and empires, 239; Nineveh and Tyre, 239; Babylon, 240; descendants of Ishmael, 242; Egyptians, 242; descendants of Canaan, Shem, and Japheth, 242; Daniel's prediction concerning the four empires, 243; prophecies of Daniel, St. Paul, and St. John, respecting the western apostacy, 245; those concerning the future conversion of the world, and the final triumph of holiness and truth, 249.

Prophets, the, had a solemn mission and call, known by all the nation, i. 194; were men of sincere personal piety, 194; their prophecies form but a small part of their general instructions, 195; their messages were often of the most distressing nature to their personal feelings, 196; they suffered even unto death, 196; they record minutely every thing, even though it might seem to make against them, 196. They performed miracles, 196. The number and ages of the prophets, and the independence of their predictions, increase the proof of divine prescience, 213.

Prophetical argument, the force of, i. 252.

Prophetical inspiration, accumulation of, i. 216.

Prudence and discretion of Jesus Christ, ii. 105.

Reason conducts us to revelation, ii. 307 ; her province marked out, 311 ; Mr. Locke's account of, 310 ; Bishop J. B. Sumner's observation respecting, 311 ; Lord Bacon's remark on the office of reason, 312.

Reasonableness of faith in the Christian Revelation, ii. 307.

Reasoning defined by Dr. Thomas Brown, ii. 311 ; the clearer laws of, now acknowledged, aid us in examining the Christian Evidences, ii.

Recapitulation of the external evidences, i. 365 ; of the internal, ii. 394.

Redemption in the incarnation and sacrifice of the only-begotten Son of God, ii. 37.

Reformations in Christian countries, progress of, i. 279.

Regeneration of man described, ii. 39.

Remedy, the Bible provides a, for all the wants of man, ii. 17 ; which works by proposing adequate motives, 19 ; placing him in a favourable state of probation, 20 ; proposing a system of means adapted to his powers, 20 ; all agreeing with his outward circumstances, 21 ; calculated to draw out to the utmost all his faculties, 21 ; and to carry him on to his true end, 22.

Resurrection of the dead, and the last solemn judgment, ii. 40.

Revelation, the necessity of a divine, appears from the state of the heathen world, before the coming of Christ, i. 44 ; of unbelievers at present scattered in Christian lands, 50 ; of pagan nations of the present day, 54 ; and of the countries of Christendom themselves, 57. A general impression has prevailed that God has granted one to man, 61.

Ridley's dying address to Latimer, ii. 286.

Rites and usages, religious, springing out of Christianity, and subsisting at the present day, i. 132.

Rome, the Church and Bishop of, the great western apostacy foretold by Daniel, St. Paul, and St. John, i. 245.

Rousseau and Doddridge contrasted. ii. 269. Rousseau on his death-bed, 282.

Rulers and Governors of our country, address to, ii. 422.

Rules for the sound interpretation of Scripture, ii. 339.

- Sacraments*, the, and the other means of grace, ii. 40.
- Sacred Volume* is unique and unparalleled in the history of the world, i. 114.
- Safety-lamp*, Christianity a, ii. 253.
- Sensual pleasures* must be renounced before the evidence of miracles can be received, i. 176.
- Seriousness* essential to a right investigation of the Christian evidences, i. 29.
- Shem*, the present state of the descendants of, fulfils the prophecy concerning them, i. 243.
- Simplicity* of the Christian doctrines, ii. 43.
- Sincere* inquirer receives Christianity on the external evidences, ii. 3.
- Spirituality* in the sum of Christian morals, ii. 66.
- Spurious writings*, marks of, i. 73 ; not one of them to be found in books of New Testament, 74.
- Student* of Christianity must be docile, i. 24 ; serious, 24 ; prayerful, 25 ; obedient, 25 ; humble and practical, alone pleases God, 147. Address to the docile and sincere, 175. Should study the sacred Volume with increasing diligence, 203 ; with a practical end in view, 205 ; have singleness of heart, 256. Student convinced, 285.
- Stedfastness* in the Christian faith urged, ii. 83.
- Style and manner* of the books of the New Testament, i. 104.
- Submission* to the Christian faith should be immediate, ii. 392 ; cordial, 393.
- Success* of Christianity in proportion to the removal of hindrances, ii. 136.
- Suicide*, infidelity too often hurries on its votaries to commit, ii. 288.
- Suitableness* of Christianity to the state and wants of man ; the nature of the argument stated, ii. 1 ; established by the decisive language which the Christian Revelation speaks, 9 ; the mysteries of his condition which it unfolds, 13 ; the remedy for all his wants which it provides, 17 ; and as it is calculated for universal diffusion, 23. This adaptation does not strike the mind at first, 27 ; yet was originally formed by the wisdom of God, 28 ; and is best seen from the midst of human weakness, misery, and sorrow, 29.
- Sumner, Bishop J. B.*, i. 311.
- Swartz and Volney* contrasted, ii. 270.

Tacitus, testimony of, to the gospel facts, i. 125 ; to the propagation of Christianity, 261.

Temper of mind in which Christianity should be studied, i. 23 ; is characterized by docility, 24 ; seriousness, 24 ; prayer, 25 ; obedience, 25 ; entirely wanting in unbelievers—literary, 26 ; uninformed, 29 ; low and profane, 30. Its indispensable importance appears, from the influence of the passions over the understanding, 31 ; acknowledged to be essential to every important investigation, 32 ; must be yet more so in the investigation of the Christian evidences, 33 ; and is required by Christianity herself, 33. This temper should be cultivated by those who are harassed by suspicions, 37 ; by the young, 40 ; and by all, 40.

Temperance of Jesus Christ, ii. 104.

Temple at Jerusalem, description of, i. 228. Attempt by Julian to rebuild it, frustrated, 235.

Tendency of Christianity to promote the temporal and spiritual happiness of nations and individuals, ii. 121 ; appears from the direction which it takes, 128 ; the hindrances opposed to it, 132 ; its success in proportion to the removal of them, 136 ; and the ultimate effects which it will produce when all obstacles are removed, 143. Each individual should show forth this tendency by his holy life, 150 ; and pray for the copious influences of grace to hasten on the blessed period when the tendencies of Christianity shall become effects, 152.

Tertullian, testimony of, to the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, i. 96, 102 ; to the inspiration, 340.

— and *Origen* state the extent of the propagation of Christianity, i. 262.

Test, the, to which every one may bring the truth of the Christian religion, ii. 154 ; the nature of the argument, 155 ; the scriptural authority on which it rests, 160 ; the facts by which it is sustained, 164 ; there is nothing in it to excite astonishment, 170. The defect of experience in some persons, no valid objection to the argument, 172. The singular importance of the proof thus educed, being entirely level to the mass of mankind, 174 ; the most satisfactory to men of all classes, 177 ; a growing evidence, 179 ; strengthening all the external and internal proofs, 180 ; and peculiarly necessary in the present day, 182. An appeal to sincere Christians in support of this argument, 185 ; directions for the application of the test, 188 ; the character of persons prepared to enter on a personal trial, 189.

Theophilus' testimony to the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, i. 340.

Tranquillity of mind produced by faith, ii. 321.

Translation of the Bible, the fidelity of the English, i. 145.

Tyre, destruction of, i. 240.

Valens' testimony to the love of Christians to the holy books, i. 96.

Unbelievers want the temper of mind in which alone Christianity can be properly studied, i. 26. They betray a wrong temper, 35. Their five common principles, 50; borrowed from Christianity, 50; held loosely, 52; wholly insufficient as a guide to man, 53. See *Infidels*, *Infidelity*.

Union of separate graces in our Saviour's personal character, ii. 106.

Universal diffusion, the Bible is calculated for, ii. 23; both as to matter, 23; and manner, 25.

Volney and Swartz contrasted, ii. 27.

Voltaire, the character and conduct of ii. 262. His last days, 285.

Warburton's, Bishop, opinion on the inspiration of the New Testament, i. 322, 319.

World, our Lord's superiority to the, ii. 103.

Writers on the evidences have pursued various methods, ii. 416; primitive, 416; literary, 417; theological, 417; metaphysical, 418; historical, 418; Christian, 418.

Young, address to the, i. 372, 375; exhorted to shun vicious courses, ii. 249; to be careful not to provoke the Spirit of God to depart from them, 249; and to see that they possess the substantial blessings of Christianity, 250. Convinced from the lives and deaths of infidels, that their objections confirm Christianity, 294.

THE END.

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